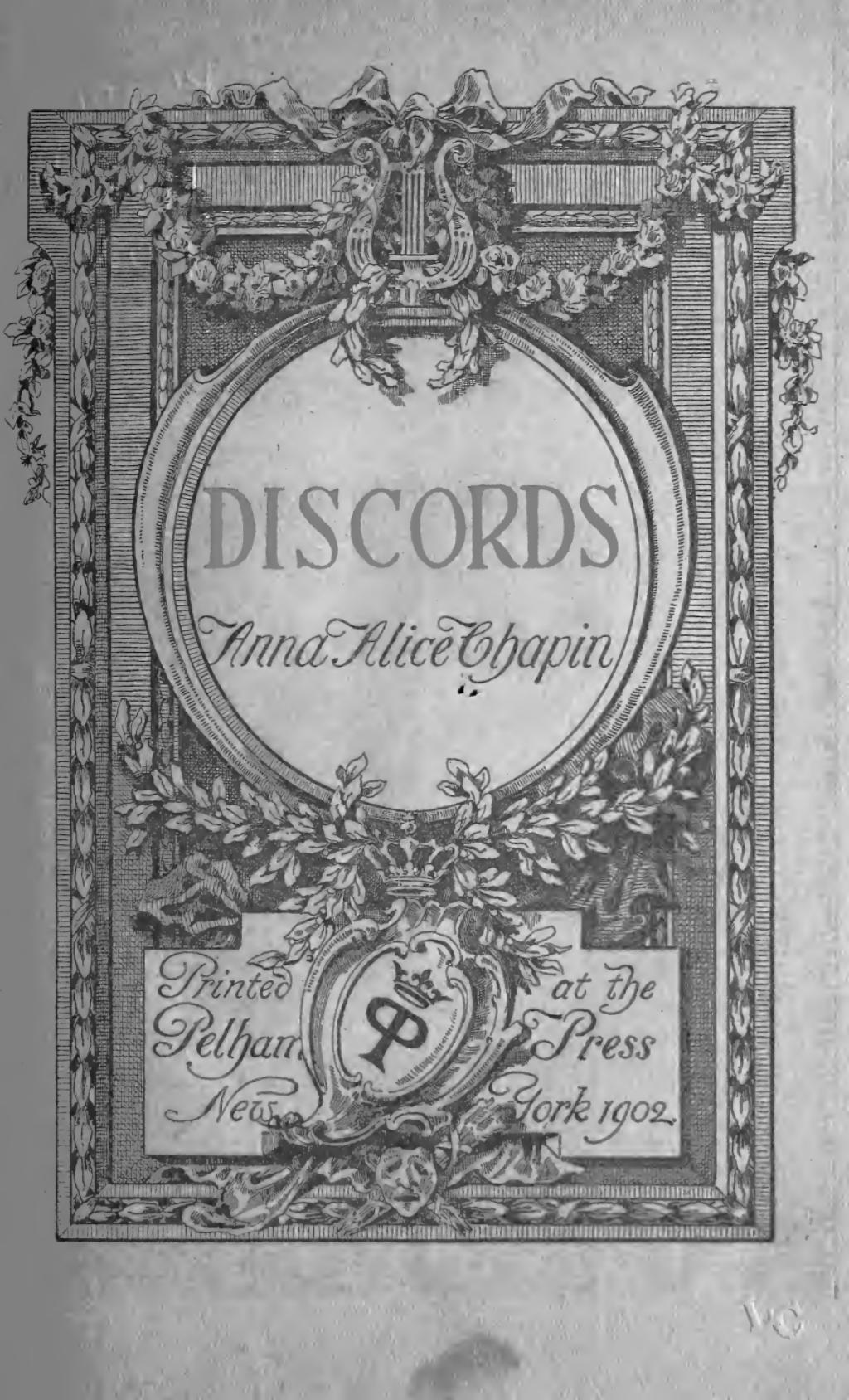


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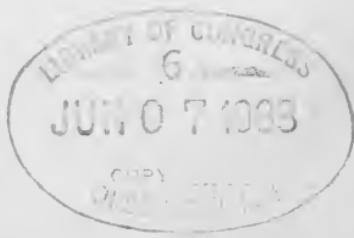


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AN EPILOGUE

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An Epilogue



“**CONFESS,”** said the Distinguished Diplomat, smiling down the well-set table at his well-dressed guests, “I confess to a foolish and ill-balanced love of the romantic and the picturesque! It has carried me into all sorts of weaknesses and many real troubles, but I can’t seem to outgrow it! Give me a romance, and I can forgive anything.”

His genial laugh, the laugh of a man whose autumn of life was as cheerful as most people’s midsummer, was infectious. Even Lady Harvey smiled a response to his good humour. She,—be it interpolated,—was a fair, beautiful woman, hardly more than a girl in years, and only recently married to good-looking, conservative Archie Harvey of the

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Dragoons. Colonel Sir Archibald Harvey they put it in Burke, but no one ever dreamed of calling him anything but Archie. His bride was very blonde and very quiet and very cold, and it was no secret that she did not love Archie; indeed, most people agreed that she was too essentially a "good woman" to ever really love any man.

"That's an unsafe taste of yours," bantered Regie Craig, a young journalist of the dilettante order. "Romance is the most unstable of all guides for a man's principles!"

"Romance!" retorted the Distinguished Diplomat, scornfully. "My boy, you do not even know what it is! You are all too busy, or too refined, or too scientific, or too something, nowadays, to experience a *grand passion* or know a violent emotion except by proxy! And when one does give you a case of love-at-first-sight, or good, old-time vengeance, or 'all for love and the world well lost,'—or any other example of the adventurous impulses,—you mutter 'Shocking!' or 'Savage!' and think you have disposed of the subject!"

"You are really shocking Lady Harvey already!" laughed the Brunette at the Dis-

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tinguished Diplomat's right. Lady Harvey had courteously assumed the responsibilities of hostess for the evening, and sat opposite the host. She smiled gently and appealingly down at him, with eyes as gravely innocent as those of a child, while Archie beamed his pride in her.

“Aren't things at cross-purposes in life?” murmured the Actress of Character Parts who sat next to the young Journalist. “The Harvey woman would forget Archie's existence if people didn't keep asking them together. Yet he adores her as much as though she were not his wife! And there's Lily Cole,—the dark girl, you know,—who would have gone out and currycombed his horses with pleasure!”

“Fact?”

“Fact it is.”

And they went on with their dinner.

“Yes,” the Distinguished Diplomat continued, “I don't doubt that if I cited one or two of the instances which have particularly interested me in my career, you would all look upon me as a horrid old man, with no conscience, and a simply scandalous taste for meddling!”

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Lady Harvey looked soft and intoxicating depreciation.

“Oh!” breathed the Actress of Character Parts, very gently, “she can do it after all, eh?”

“What?”

“Flirt. Look at that glance! Dear me, she could teach a great deal to us cruder artists!”

“Why not try us?” suggested Archie, with an inspiration of purely transitory intelligence. “Tell us one of your instances, or whatever you call ‘em, and see what we all think of it.”

“That would be weakness and bad manners,” declared the Distinguished Diplomat, modestly, “to monopolize my own table in that fashion.”

But—perhaps because the guests were at cross-purposes, if not actually badly chosen and assorted—they insisted. General conversation, not dialogues, seemed desired, so the host obediently took the lead and they listened with as much attention as they cared to spare from the really excellent dinner.

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“Since you are kind enough to make a point of it,” he said, “I will promptly imagine myself a sort of narrator, such as we come across in the old tales, and taking one remembered romance at random, I will unfold to you as much of it as I am lucky enough to know. It is a brief glimpse or indication, nothing more,—but the situation interested me, and you may be able to fill in the blanks from your imaginations.

“Some years ago, in the course of the pursuance of my profession in St. Petersburg, I met a curious and interesting man. I will not mention his name, I will call him merely the Prince,—both in courtesy to his title, and to lose none of the permissible romantic accessories to the situation! We did not readily become intimate, for he in some ways repelled even while he attracted me. However, in spite of many definite causes for disliking him, he did fascinate me and absorb my attention when I was in his company. He possessed to an extreme degree the magnetic power, and when I tell you that he flattered my vanity by appearing to care for my company, in spite of the great difference in our ages, (a difference vastly in

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his favour) and further that he was the most daring adventurer whom I have ever met, you will possibly understand my interest in him.

“He was one of the handsomest men, I firmly believe, ever born. I will not describe him, but will merely tell you that he alone, among the many persons pointed out to me at various times as deserving that comparison, was really like a Scandinavian god. He had an extreme love of luxury, an animal enjoyment of all sensuous things, together with a savage power of endurance, and he was quite unscrupulous. His chief passion was jewels, and he owned some of the rarest and most unusual gems, I believe, that have ever been in any private collection. Among his possessions was a jewel which he used to call his Amourette, an absurdly frivolous name for so wonderful a stone, but, as I must tell you, he was a mass of perversities and whimsicalities. The Amourette was an immense emerald of extraordinary colour and lustre. He pointed out to me an infinitesimal flaw which slightly lessened its market value, but did not in the smallest degree impair its beauty to a connoisseur.

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He often told me that he was keeping the Amourette for a woman,—the woman whom he considered worthy to wear it. ‘I’ve never found her yet,’ he declared, ‘but when you miss the emerald, *mon ami*, that, you may know, is where it has gone.’ In the course of time, I drifted away from St. Petersburg, and I did not see the Prince or his collection of jewels or the Amourette for a year. Then I met him in a curious way, one late afternoon in Paris.

“I was walking near the Arc de Triomphe, it being an hour when I often went out to watch faces, and invent appropriate romances to fit groups or incidents which came in my way. I soon became interested in a woman who was walking just in front of me. She did not look like the type of woman who would be apt to be wandering about Paris alone, only a short time before dusk. At least, let me qualify that: her dress and bearing led me to believe that her family would not approve of promiscuous wandering of this sort, and I shrewdly guessed that she had left her maid somewhere behind her. I am afraid that I stared very hard at the lady’s back, for it was a very graceful one;

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and I like pretty women whose figures and clothes suit each other. I approved of the way she walked, and I also liked her splendid, sunny, golden hair, and the angle on which her small head was set on her very round and well-proportioned body. I am sorry that I cannot describe her gown; I have a dim impression that it was of some nondescript colour,—gray or violet or something of that sort, and I distinctly remember that her hat was black and absurd as to shape, though I don't doubt it was becoming to her face. I should much like to have seen the latter!

“My narrative is growing longer than I had intended it to be. You must really forgive me, but my tongue runs away with me in matters of reminiscence! While I was strolling quietly along and making quite casual and idle conjectures as to the station and identity of the fair-haired lady in the pretty clothes who walked in front of me, I saw a rather smart-looking turn-out coming down the street rapidly. The horse was very good, the cart all that could be desired, the livery of the groom behind was perfect, and the man who drove was an excellent

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match for the rest; and that is by no means a matter of course, you know! He was big, good-looking, and properly dressed,—and imagine my surprise in recognizing him to be my St. Petersburg friend, the Prince!

“He did not notice me, indeed I must frankly say that he only seemed to notice one person or thing in his surroundings. That was the blonde lady in front of me. She had stopped, by the bye, and stood looking at the approaching turn-out,—which was coming at a much slower rate of speed now; the Prince was pulling up, all the time with his eyes fixed upon her. Let me confess to my usual curiosity in a possibly romantic climax; I seated myself unostentatiously on a bench, and I watched the performance with as casual an air as I could command.

“My friend pulled up at the curb, still staring in a way which surprised me and quite upset my ideas concerning his traditionally unimpeachable good manners. Then he gave the lines to the man and alighted. The girl started away from him as he approached, but he stopped her with an appealing sort of gesture. Then they talked. Naturally I did not try to listen; even my

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sins in the cause of romance have their limit. I gazed down the street and watched some gamins fighting in a gutter, and I kept my face turned away from the Prince and, I feared, his ultimate recognition of me. Suddenly I heard him say: ‘Call me Fate,—Chance,—the Unknown,—what you will! What does it matter? What do names matter? What does anything matter? You are brave enough to defy convention,—another woman would not be, but I know from your face that you are. Will you come?’

“I did not hear her answer, and I carefully avoided looking in their direction. So in the one moment when I think her face was turned toward me, I did not see her. I wished afterward that I had looked at her well, and tried to analyze the charm which was the Prince’s bane and rapture and ultimate undoing. After another short conversation, he raised his hat and fell back; she walked on quickly, and then, just as he turned to enter his trap once more, he saw me. I instantly rose and came forward, not trying to ignore what I had been looking at.

“‘I have been out seeking romance, as usual,’ I remarked, by way of greeting. ‘But

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I got more than I bargained for! Where did you drop from?’

“The flush which had risen to his forehead when he first saw me died away somewhat. He held out his hand with a heartiness which, knowing his variable and contradictory nature, I cannot approximately estimate as being sincere or feigned.

“‘My dear fellow,’ he said, ‘one is sure of a certain number of surprises in this world! One begins to get bored, and to think that nothing ever happens; and behold! whole chains of happenings follow promptly on the conviction! I have been telling myself that a trip to the East and an investigation of hashish was the only fresh variety of sensation which I could command; and now I am taken with a *grand passion* on the spur of the moment, and I am surprised,—positively surprised, in my blasé attitude of mind,—by your appearance!’

“Any other man would have irritated me by his affectations in speech, but there was the fellow’s old influence over me, back again as strong as ever.

“‘I have been watching a chapter of your *grand passion*,’” I said, rather shamefacedly.

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“ He sighed and smiled response.

“ ‘The first chapter, dear man !’ he said. ‘ But why waste time here ? You will drive back with me to my rooms and dine, and we will try to bridge over the time of our separation by a little retrospective explanation and narrative ! ’

“ Of course I went with him ; I had nothing on for the evening, except an Embassy reception, which might be postponed into an indefinite lateness of hour. On the way I enquired for the Amourette.

“ ‘In excellent spirits,’ he told me. ‘ As fine in colour and copious of brilliancy as ever ! I am inclined to think that the Amourette and I will soon part company ! ’

“ ‘Not debts,’ I hazarded, ‘ or a woman ? ’

“ ‘Debts ! ’ He laughed long at that. ‘ A woman,—yes ! I have at last seen someone to whom I think the emerald would be becoming ! ’

“ Our dinner was one of those very brief, very perfect affairs which are to ordinary meals what orchids are to plebeian daisies. Over it we talked of everything on earth except the blonde lady of the Arc de Triomphe.

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“He told me of various curious events which had occurred in his curious life since our last meeting. He described a trip which he had taken in the interests of detective work, and which had ended in the recovery of an important official paper; he told me of a gambling establishment run under cover of a fashionable private house, and of the woman who was used as a decoy there; he edified me by accounts of several of his later escapades, all of them interesting, most of them not fit for repetition here, even if I chose to lengthen out this long, and I doubt not tedious, narrative. Your faces disclaim ennui, yet I am nevertheless doubtful of my wisdom in pursuing my subject to the end. However, I have begun and I will finish.

“In the course of time, I reminded my friend of his allusion to the Amourette, and expressed a desire to see it again. It was instantly forthcoming, and held out to me,—gleaming up, like the lustre that shows between the big green waves when the sun is shining, from the white velvet of its box. The Prince kept it always in a tiny silver case, velvet-lined and shaped like a bonbon-

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niére, and he was very apt to have it in an inner pocket where, in fact, he had it now.

“‘It is as wonderful as ever,’ I declared,—an idiotic remark, but the gem always fascinated me. ‘It would look well on some woman’s neck, would it not?’

“‘Provided the neck were of the requisite whiteness and form,’ he laughed, ‘and particularly if the face topping it were as fair as a pale tea-rose, and the hair red-gold.’

“‘Come!’ I could not help saying, ‘tell me something of your little affairs, an incident in which I was so indiscreet as to witness a few hours ago. I am morally, or unmorally, certain that you are at this instant picturing the Amourette glowing in the bosom of that very lady with whom you were talking so ardently.’

“‘Why deny it?’ he said recklessly, slipping the silver box back into his pocket. ‘She is a young goddess, an Aphrodite, a Heré, a——’

“‘I am sure of it!’ I interrupted hastily. ‘But when did you meet her, and who is she?’

“‘I met her,’ he said, with a queer smile, ‘near the Arc de Triomphe, this afternoon; and you know as much about her as I do.’

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“I gasped at this. I was prepared for almost any confession of insanity on the part of my friend, the Prince, but this was beyond the limit of ordinary belief. Still, he was capable of it; this I acknowledged to myself, even while I gasped.

“‘Do you seriously mean to tell me,’ I said, ‘that the woman with whom I heard you talking, and with whom I believe that I heard you making some sort of an appointment or arrangement, is a complete stranger to you?’

“He smiled, rather sardonically.

“‘Dear friend,’ he said sweetly, ‘I mean to tell you nothing seriously. Nevertheless the lady is a stranger to me—unless you will permit me to except in my dreams!’

“He proceeded to further astonish me by analyzing for my benefit, and with an eloquence and an introspective dexterity which was remarkable in its way, the nature of his passion for the beautiful unknown. He said calmly that he believed her to be similarly attracted, so to speak, emotionally. He had induced her, he explained, to consent to go with him for a week or two to a little box he had hired in Normandy, and she was to

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meet him at the station the next morning at seven minutes after eleven. Allow me to state here, even if it is lacking in discretion, that my amazement was not in the least caused by my friend's proposed visit to Normandy with an unknown lady, that being, I must confess, the most ordinary and customary performance for him, possible to imagine. But, feeling confident that the woman was a lady in point of fact as well as of courtesy, and that her bearing was distinctly that produced by rank and breeding, I was astonished. The Prince's affairs had comprised a variety of stations in life, and had been carried on in diverse ways, but this calm proposal to carry away a young and well-born girl to his Normandy box, without the formality of discovering her name or disclosing his, capped the climax in the list of all his escapades. His next remark showed that he perceived the peculiar points of the matter himself.

“‘She is evidently a lady,’ he said. ‘Could you see that from the back of her head? Also, allow me to inform you, she cannot be more than eighteen. Am I a blackguard, *mon ami*? ’

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“‘Rather, I suppose,’ I said, but I could not help laughing. ‘However, if she wants to go with you, I should think you were quite exonerated. What a young devil she must be!’

“‘Every woman who amounts to anything has a spice of the devil,’ he observed, tranquilly, but I think he hardly liked my characterization. This, too, was a novelty in him. I knew his opinion of *le beau sexe* in general. ‘I imagine from what she said that she is visiting friends here, and that her family expect her to join them in England in a few days.’

“‘Oh,—English?’

“‘Very English. That is, in all save her impulses.’

“‘And her power of yielding to them,’ I remarked, drily; for I knew that British maidens yield to temptation about as readily as British youths refrain from pheasant-shooting. ‘She must be a curious specimen.’

“‘I have already told you she was a goddess,’ he said with a laugh. After which he resolutely changed the subject, and I was obliged to content myself with generalities until the time for my reception came, and

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I betook myself in the direction of the Embassy.

“‘I shall not see you then for two weeks,’ I said, in parting.

“‘No, not for two weeks!’ He laughed a little, and waved me a good-bye. I went my way, more interested in the matter and less shocked than a respectable member of society and the diplomatic corps should confess! I had a curious notion that I should hear from my erratic Prince in a day or two. I was not disappointed. In thirty-six hours a brief note postmarked at a small town in Normandy reached me. In effect, the epistle ran as follows:

“‘In the hurry of starting, my dear friend, we omitted to send three very important telegrams: One to Mademoiselle’s family, one to Mademoiselle’s maid, who is visiting her mother in a Paris Faubourg somewhere, and one to Mademoiselle’s friend in Cherbourg. Be good enough to send all three, which I enclose. It is necessary, as you will perceive, that they should come from Paris! Also, please be good enough to send a second message to Mademoiselle’s family in a week’s time, containing the brief

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statement: 'Am well—leaving for home next week.' A thousand thanks, *mon ami*! You are our good angel, and Mademoiselle, did I confide to her your assistance, would thank you as affectionately as does your most devoted _____."

"There his name was signed. The enclosures were three duly written telegrams. The names and addresses inscribed on each are immaterial, and with one exception I have forgotten them. Suffice it to say that one explained to Mademoiselle's family that she was going to visit 'Lucille' for two weeks; one told 'Lucille' that she regretted she could not visit her; the third directed Mademoiselle's maid to extend her visit to her mother until further notice, as Mademoiselle had no immediate need of her. They were all signed by initials,—M. L. D., I think. Dear friends, what should I have done? In the cause of propriety, which is the antithesis of romance, I should indignantly have refused to smooth M. L. D.'s path of wrong-doing, or to embroil myself in a net of trifling deceptions. In the cause of romance,—which laughs at propriety, (having a higher and at the same time a more practical code

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of morality),—I obediently went out and sent the telegrams myself, paying for them, willingly enough, out of my own pocket! When the week had passed, I proceeded to send the second message to Mademoiselle's family in England, and I can assert upon my honour that my conscience never gave me a twinge.

“ Well, in time, the Prince came back to his rooms in Paris, and I was summoned to lunch with him promptly. I confess that my heart went out to him when I found him, that gray day, sitting smoking by the fire. He looked older, it struck me, yet I had never so strongly felt the protective emotion justified by the disparity in our ages, as I did at that moment. He greeted me affectionately enough,—how sincerely I know not.

“ ‘ Well, my dear boy, you are back,’ was my superfluous observation, as I took my seat, and accepted a cigarette.

“ ‘ Yes,’ he answered, listlessly, ‘ and I was a damned fool ever to have gone. I must tell you about it, or I shall lose my temper, simply thinking over it.’

“ So he launched forth upon a long account of the two weeks in Normandy,—the

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madness which had possessed him, and her, too,—the conviction which had grown upon him day by day, that this passion of his was really the one serious emotion of his life.

“‘Heaven knows,’ he fumed, ‘I know the value and the limit of light love. Well!—this was nothing of the kind. In a day I knew that that girl was the one thing necessary to my happiness. I felt as though I wanted to carry her off to Africa, or Siberia, or——’

“‘Hard on her!’ I murmured. He flashed out more fiercely at that.

“‘It isn’t in the least a matter for a joke. I tell you I love her. Oh, call it absurd,—damnable nonsense, anything you like,—but you’ve got to take it seriously or——’

“‘Tranquilize yourself, as the French say,’ I told him, soothingly. ‘I am taking it seriously. So she was as wonderful as that, eh?’

“‘Yes,’ he said, his fire fading a little, ‘she was as wonderful as that.’

“‘And has she the Amourette?’ I asked.

“‘Yes.’

“I shook my head. Clearly it was the genuine article, this passion of his, if he had

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given her the emerald which had failed to be assailed by any of his preceding love-affairs, however long of duration they had been, or however apparently serious of intent at the time.

“ His further explanation followed. According to his tale, the two weeks in the little Normandy box had not been all halcyon. He had felt a certain element of cold savagery in her which had chilled him at the very moment when it most strongly touched an appreciative chord in his own odd make-up. She was absolutely indifferent to suffering, whether mental or physical, whether in herself or others. She had a note of recklessness in her spirit, a touch of hardness, and a wealth of passion, which was amazing in an English girl of eighteen and of established antecedents. She professed to love him, but when, impelled by the novelty as well as the fervour of his emotions, he had suggested to her that they make the purely temporary arrangement permanent and go away together to the ends of the earth and be happy, she had stared at him as though she suspected his reason of being unbalanced.

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“‘ You must have forgotten that the agreement was distinctly limited as to time,’ she said. He pleaded that, on his part, it had come to be more than a mere agreement, subject to limitations or curtailment,—that it was now a living necessity to his happiness. He told her that she was his mate,—his love,—he offered her everything he owned. She looked at him unmoved.

“‘ I am engaged to be married,’ she said, icily, ‘ to an Englishman and a gentleman. I shall leave you to-night and forget you to-morrow.’

“ The thing was so unspeakable, her impertinence so colossal, and her strange perverted point of view so unanswerable, that he had no more words. She did leave him that night, without a word of good-bye, and he did not doubt, he declared bitterly, that she had kept her word, in regard to the second point as well as the first, and had forgotten his existence the next day.

“ Never since has the mysterious woman, who is the owner of one of the largest emeralds in existence, crossed my path. Once only she crossed my friend’s. It was at some big race in England, and she was sitting on a

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coach with a well-known sporting man and watching the race. The Prince raised his hat to her; she looked at him, growing a shade whiter, he thought, and cut him dead. He never forgave her for that. My story ends nowhere, as you see. One day this extraordinary man informed me that he was too unendurably bored to support life another moment, and he accordingly took a dose of opium disguised with a strong liqueur, and departed in search of other and newer sensations in other and newer worlds."

The Distinguished Diplomat came to a full stop at last. Several of the guests looked politely bored by this time; one or two seemed really sorry to hear the close; three alone showed an interest as intense as it was curious. The Journalist was staring hard at the Actress of Character Parts.

"What is the matter with you?" he whispered. "What are you looking at?"

"I am studying a face," said the Actress of Character Parts, immovably. Her eyes were fixed upon Lady Harvey. "I am studying with all the power of perception I possess. Don't bother me; I wouldn't have missed this for a diamond bracelet."

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Lady Harvey was leaning back in her chair fanning herself slowly. She was very, very pale, and her fair hair stood out more vividly than ever around the absolute waxen white of her face.

"It is close in here, is it not?" said the Distinguished Diplomat, noticing her pallour. "Drink some wine, Lady Harvey. You look ill."

"I am not ill," she answered, quietly, still fanning. "Do go on with your story. Is there nothing more?" She spoke almost eagerly.

"Nothing," he answered. "I would give something to know what became of the woman and the Amourette; but that is the worst of Fate. As a dramatist she is unapproachable up to a certain point, but she never can manage a *dénouement* satisfactorily."

"So there is no epilogue!" said the Brunette, disappointedly.

"None that we know of," answered the Distinguished Diplomat, "and perhaps it is as well. It probably would be an anti-climax."

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Later, when they were all in the drawing-room, the Distinguished Diplomat showed Lady Harvey a photograph of his dead friend, the eccentric Prince of the narrative. The face was a strikingly handsome one, of singularly attractive expression, and very sombre eyes. She looked at it in silence, and gave it back. The Distinguished Diplomat put it on the table, and, there in the heavy silver frame, the nameless Prince looked out on the lazily chattering guests imperturbably.

"What are you looking at now?" asked the Journalist once more of the Actress of Character Parts.

"Still studying that face," she answered, slowly. "Some day I may want to impersonate a woman who is hiding some inner emotion magnificently, but who is almost overcome by some sudden blow. And there is my model."

"Nonsense!" said the Journalist. But, meanwhile, the Distinguished Diplomat and Lady Harvey still sat together, and near them was the Prince looking out from his silver frame. Suddenly Lady Harvey raised

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her eyes to her Inquisitor's face with a quiet abandonment of subterfuge.

"He is really dead?" she said.

"Really."

"I did not know that; I had not heard. Did he speak—of me—at all, toward the end?"

"No."

"Thank you." She choked a little. Then she went on:

"Why did you tell this to-night? Think of what it must have been to me."

"I was not sure it was you until I was half through the story."

"You suspected?"

"Yes; from the address on one of those telegrams, and one or two other things, including intuitive evidence."

"And you told it because—"

"Shall we say partly from curiosity, and partly because I thought you needed a little punishment? He loved you, you see, in his own queer way; and he is dead."

With as little ostentation as possible, she drew out something which was suspended on a fabulously slender chain and hidden in

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her bosom. It was an emerald of great size and deep colour.

“I wear it always,” she said simply.

A slight look of pity came into his eyes and he took her fan and began to fan her himself.

“Here are the liqueurs,” he said. “Take one, Lady Harvey, and forget this absurd story.” He had raised his voice intentionally with the last words. “I am so glad,” he added, speaking to the others generally, “that I was able to make you take my little narrative seriously. It was pretty, I flatter myself, but a total fabrication, from beginning to end,—except for the identity of my friend.”

“Not true?” they chorused, righteously disgusted with his deception.

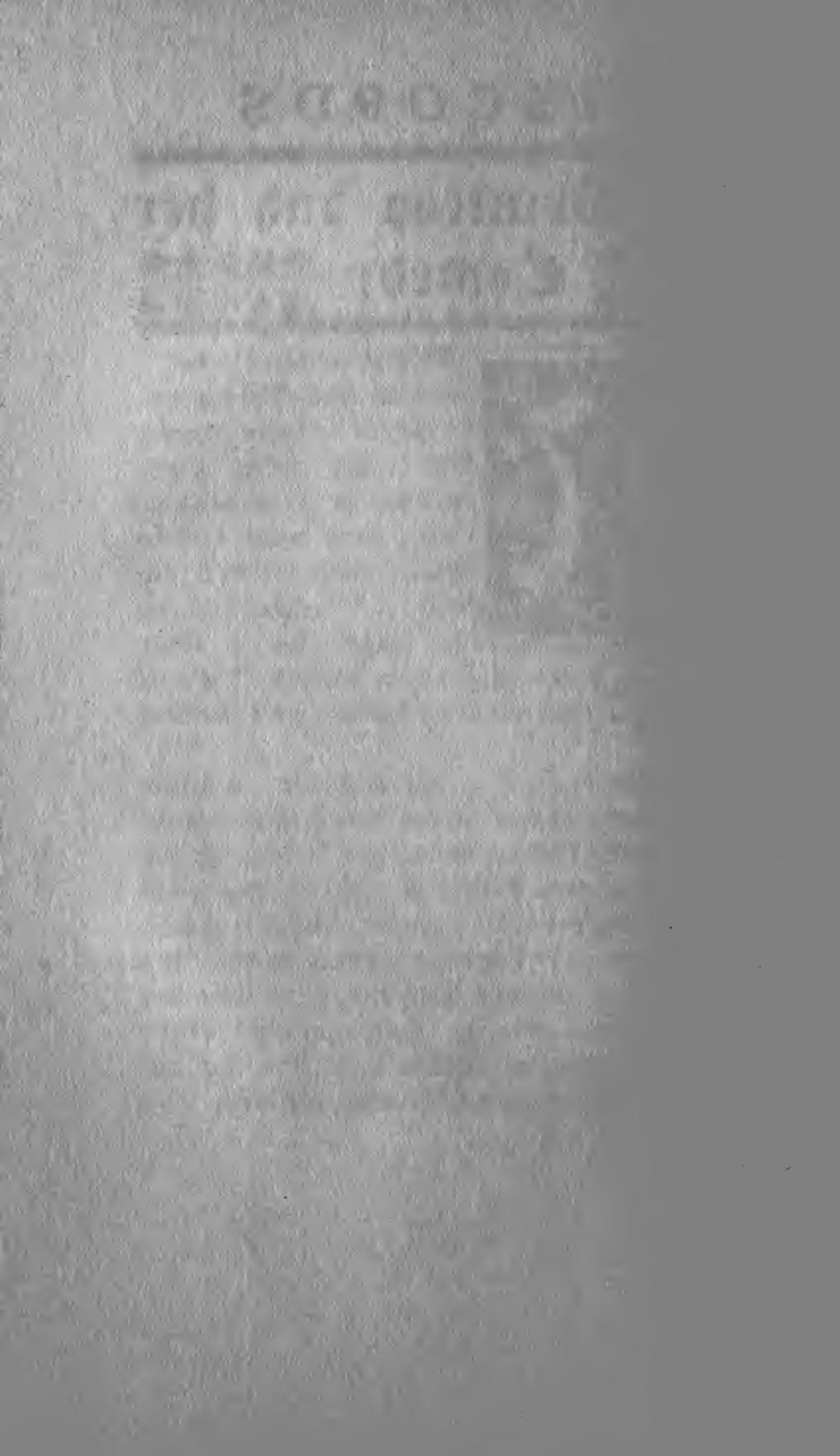
“Not true—in the smallest particular. As I told you, I am not to be trusted on the subject of romance!”

He was still fanning Lady Harvey. He alone could see the passionate gratitude in her eyes. She said no word, but he understood, and marvelled a little at the minds and hearts of women. She raised her glass of Bénédictine to her lips, and her gaze

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drifted absently, wistfully, to the likeness of the dead Prince in the silver frame. And the Amourette glowed unconcernedly on the slender chain, drinking in the unwonted light before she hid it once more in her bosom.

THE PRINCESS AND HER COMEDY



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The Princess and her Comedy

“



EVER to have lived!" sighed the Princess. "Never to have known the least bit of a romance or a comedy to look back upon and to smile over when I am old! I should like to have had a little masque, a little play-time, before I am a middle-aged married princess, and settled for life."

The Princess sat at her window. I know not the name of her home, but it was somewhere under Italian skies, and it was spring there. And the Princess was on fire with the growing electric current which seemed to run through the whole waking earth. She was not yet twenty, and the next day her betrothal to a strange distinguished Duke was to be formally celebrated. She did not love the Duke, and a betrothal without love

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is at all times an ill thing, but particularly so in spring; then, if ever, the boy Love runs vagrant-like through the land, and all men acknowledge his sway and attend his bidding.

The Princess had dark hair and eyes and a skin which looked as though pure molten gold ran in her veins mixed with the rich red blood. She was not sentimental, but there was a sharp, tugging pain in her heart, as she looked out of her window and breathed the subtle, vague aroma of opening buds and springing grass. Her duenna called her and bade her come to her embroidery, but the Princess rebelled.

"I detest it—the embroidery," she said, feelingly, "all foolish crosses and flowers and gold and purple thread, set together with a meaning that only the designers can comprehend. I do not think that Monsignore the Cardinal wants such foolish trimming for his vestments."

"Hush,—you are not respectful to the holy ecclesiastical pattern, cara mia. You are an irreverent child."

"Signora," pursued the girl, unheeding, "do you not think it rather sad that I have

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never had the smallest shadow of a romance or a comedy?"

"They are indeed shadows," said the duenna, seriously. "You are better without either. Though indeed I think you will find one or the other in time. Life is very much of a comedy, *carrissima*,—and that you will discover for yourself."

Yet she sighed, and could say no more to discourage her charge's discontent. She sat silent, and thought of her own spring and its undying brightness. She knew that her present dull lot was only rendered endurable by the echoes of her own young laughter which still rang in her brain, though it was many years since she had left all comedies behind. Sometimes her heart sang yet with the joy of love, though the man she loved had been dead for thirty years. She slipped out of the room soon, and left the Princess at the window, with the spring music outside, and the breath of spring blowing—blowing past, with a challenge and a bidding in its sweetness.

Now, it was an hour later that the good lady returned to bid the Princess go to be dressed for her drive. But the room was empty.

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“Margherita,” she called, softly, but Margherita was gone.

“Pardon, Signora,” said Margherita’s maid from the door of an inner room, “Her Excellency said she was going to mass, and would not let me accompany her.”

“Luisa, you know the Princess should not have gone alone. Was she veiled?”

“Yes, Signora,—and left word that you must not be disturbed. She required the fresh air, she said, Signora.”

The duenna was worried and disturbed, but—after all, what harm could come to the child? It was early afternoon, and she was veiled. She settled herself in a comfortable chair with a book, and the warm spring day drifted on.

The Princess knelt meekly in the shadowy church, and crossed herself at prescribed intervals, and tried not to think of the sun and sweetness outside. She wore her veil drawn closely over her face, and no one noticed the slender figure kneeling among the rest. But, as she came out into the sunshine, the temptation was very strong, and she raised her veil to breathe the air at

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will. The people were pressing out about her. It was good to be one of them, to feel their arms touch hers, to see their brown faces and strong, bent shoulders so close to her. She was conscious for the first time in her life of being truly alive,—one of these vast numbers of human beings, a woman born upon the earth to be as other women. The momentary sensation thrilled her. She saw a contadina with a baby held over her shoulder. She caught the woman's eyes and smiled at her. The cheerful little mother smiled in return, and the child clutched at the dark veil which blew about Margherita's hat.

"What a pretty baby!" she murmured, foolishly.

"Thank you, Excellency," said the woman, "he is well, praise God."

The term "Excellency" chilled her. She went on. No, they would not have her except as an "Excellency,"—one not of themselves.

Suddenly she saw a man watching her. He had not been to mass, evidently, and seemed to stand quite idle, leaning against the wall of a house. He was a tall man, not

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in his first youth, with a superb head and piercing eyes. These eyes were fixed upon the Princess with a strange, impersonal, but deeply interested gaze. They did not seem to recognize her as a woman, but as a being; there was in them not admiration so much as absorbed attention. Margherita felt the colour warm her face, yet with no definite sensation of embarrassment. She might have been a Shakespearean folio, or a bit of Byzantine brass-work from the way he looked at her. As she passed him, he started forward and hastened on at her side. Realizing that he had removed his hat and was about to speak, she mechanically lowered her veil, keeping her steady, leisurely pace.

"Pardon, Signorina," he said, quite without formality, but with an accent of cultivation, "I mean no disrespect, but I have a reason for wishing to speak to you."

She felt a slight thrill of excitement. Something told her that she need fear no approach to courtesy from this man. And the incident was full of a nameless interest.

"Will you allow me to speak? I repeat that you need have no anxiety. They call me mad, here, but once many years ago I

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was a gentleman. Now I am a third-rate artist and paint little pictures for my daily bread. They are very bad little pictures, Signorina, but I love them. Also I know, you see, how much better I can do. But you have not yet given me permission to speak."

One more moment she hesitated, then impelled by something—she knew not what—she turned toward him and answered, very low, "Speak, Signor."

He bowed gravely.

"They call me mad, Signorina, as I have said. Surely I am mad to address you—I, a stranger to you,—in the street! Yet, you seem to understand. Perhaps you see in me what may not be quite dead—the gentleman that I was born. To be brief, Signorina, I am painting a picture for a friend, a benefactor. He has given me the subject, he has given me the name; but I have in my brain a greater picture than he could imagine. It is to be called 'Comedy,' Signorina, and I have been hunting far and wide for a model. I wanted a face which should have in it all the vitality and strength, all the humour and gladness, of life and of

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youth,—but, underneath, that pathos which lies like an undercurrent to all gaiety. No smile is of any value, Signorina, unless the possibility of tears be behind it. In your face I have found my ideal."

Margherita started with amazement, and stared at him through her veil.

"You want me to pose for your picture,—me?" she began with marked displeasure. Then she realized, quickly, that she had brought the proposal on herself, and also that after all he knew neither her name nor rank, and could not intend an insult. In fact, he was looking at her with a certain pained expression in his eager and flashing eyes. The belief came to her suddenly that he was a very great artist, and softened her voice when she spoke.

"I am sorry, Signor," she said, coldly but gently, "it is quite out of the question."

But the man, still with that troubled look, walked on at her side.

"But, Signorina," he persisted, eagerly, "I am quite certain that you cannot know what it is to me. I am selfish, I know; all artists are selfish. But—I have dreamed of this opportunity all my life, and starved and

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struggled for it. And now it has come so close to me; the vision of it is in my brain. It will be a far greater picture than the man who ordered it even dreams. See, Signorina, I will tell you! It is the woman Comedy: she stands in a careless pose, her head is thrown back, her gay dress is old and tattered, but its lines are full of grace. The figure is complete,—it was easy to find models for that! The dress is like the costume of the female jesters of the French Court, but for the great rents in the green and yellow raiment. She is finished save for the face. But the face must be that of a young angel strayed to earth and laughing splendidly to make the sport of the mortals for whom in her heart she could really weep. Ah, Signorina, I will immortalize you in my painting! See,—you cannot go away and leave me, now that I have found my ideal!"

The Princess was surprised to find how much she was moved. The theme of the picture, the words of the artist, interested her strangely. Of course it would be monstrous if she, Margherita, Princess of D—, should allow an unknown, common painter

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to put her into his picture! Yet—the man's eyes stirred her soul. She had often longed for an opportunity to help some one, to inspire some great dream, to assist in some great work. Suppose her father should find out? Well, he could not kill her! And she was in a position to laugh at any scandal which might accrue to her if her likeness should be recognized. What was rank if not a protection from the vulgar? People would assume it was from a photograph. With a curious impulse, which seemed to come elsewhere than from herself, she turned to the artist.

"Listen," she said, "there is a reason why I should not let you paint me,—wait! a very real reason. Yet, because you interest me, because you make me believe that you really are a genius and that I may help you,—I will let you make a sketch of me; just that, no more. I can never come again, but I will give you this one afternoon to catch the likeness for your woman Comedy."

He listened with deep and passionate attention.

"Thank you, Signorina," he cried, "a thousand, thousand times! Come,—come

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quickly! I will show you what can be done in one afternoon. Ah, God is good!"

He led her down a side street, and like a creature in a dream she followed him up a long flight of stairs and into his studio. It was a large, bare room, a work-room, no more; canvases were piled against the walls, and pushed into a corner, stood a broad, coarse table upon which were a number of undusted books, some sketching-blocks of various sizes, a half unrolled charcoal study, a graceful little figurine, and a heap of some terra-cotta material which had probably been used either as background or drapery. The room would have been untidy if there had been more in it; as it was, it was like a garret or a barn. In the course of time Margherita's surprised glances encountered isolated points of beauty in the dingy desolation of the place: a rough but striking outline from the nude, done in charcoal on a very large square of paper and tacked upon the wall; a black-framed group of Bartolozzi cupids smiling in a corner; a complacent brown Buddha on a plain deal shelf, and a quaint, poster-like study in blue, white and green, which fascinated the Princess, though

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she could not know its value as one of Japan's rarest of kakemonos.

The artist went to work in wild haste. He flung the cloth off his picture,—a bold and well-executed woman's figure in the costume he had described. Then he caught up brushes and palette, and began to squeeze out colour after colour with hands that trembled.

“Be good enough to remove your hat, Signorina,” he said, in an imperative tone. She obeyed with a slight flush. He seemed the master now, and she felt very meek and obedient. Then he bade her sit where the light cast a peculiarly deep shadow beneath chin and cheek, and to tilt her head back.

So the work began.

When the Princess was very old she used to look back with curious interest to that afternoon. It was very easy to conjure up that bare studio, with the light slanting in, and the artist, his tall and slender frame instinct with power and with absorption in his work,—painting—painting—painting. There was no clock, and she had no way of knowing the hour, but she was quite certain that by that time the casa would be in a tur-

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moil of anxiety concerning her. She dreaded the home-going later. But all the while the memory of that part of her life was like a dream of things which had been years ago. This was the reality. This was, or should be, her true life,—here in the studio with the dust and the tools of art about her, and the artist painting—painting—painting.

“Do you paint here every day, Signor?” she asked, rather timidly.

“Every day, except when—”

He coloured darkly, then finished with angry bluntness,—“Except when I am drunk.”

She started and shrank, then tried to hold herself as still as before.

“That shocks you, Signorina. I did not drink years ago, when I was a gentleman. But I have had suffering and some trouble. It is no excuse, but it explains, perhaps, partly. They say that I am mad, Signorina. Is not drunkenness a kind of madness? I think indeed at times I am mad.”

He painted on. Suddenly he flung his palette from him and buried his face in his hands.

“God!” he muttered, desperately, “I can-

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not paint! I cannot! I am no longer fit!"

She rose, much bewildered and a little frightened.

"What is it, Signor?" she asked, softly.
"Why can you not paint?"

He made an eloquent gesture, pointing toward the canvas. She came quietly to his side and looked. The likeness was sufficiently good, the technique striking evidence of the man's ability and training; yet all vitality, all spirituality, all conviction of conception seemed lacking. His dream was nobler than his execution.

"It is like me, I think," she said, gently. She felt a vague but profound pity for this man, and it was in her voice as she spoke.

He looked up at her without stirring.

"Can you not see?" he said, in a low but tragic tone, "I have made it commonplace—prosaic! I, who desired it to be the culmination of poetry! No, it is too fine for me,—too fine,—too high. Ah, Signorina, I ask your pardon. You must go. I can do nothing more. I shall return to the little paintings that sell for little sums at the picture-frame shops."

His voice rang with bitterness; his eyes

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were fastened upon hers. For the first time something was in his gaze besides mere artistic appreciation. He was a man, and the Princess was very lovely and very young.

She stood silent. There were a great many thoughts within her brain at that moment, and her heart was pulsing strangely.

"Please try once more," she said at last, looking at him. "She will come,—your Comedy; but you must go on working,—please."

The artist caught her hand,—very young and slender, and cream-white like ivory,—and pressed it against his face for one short instant. His heart thanked her in the action for her belief in him. And, curiously, she was not angered, but went slowly and tranquilly back to her place, though her hand still tingled with the strength of his clasp and the fire of his cheek.

And once more he began to paint,—with a new look in his face now, and occasional deep glances which she could feel though her eyes were not on his. Then the light from bright pale gold grew rich and orange in tone, and both realized that the afternoon was waning. Outside someone was singing an

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old song,—one of the songs which the people echo generation after generation, until it becomes the expression of personal joys and longings.

And at last the artist laid down his brushes and rose. His eyes called her, and she came to look. She felt stiff and weary from her long pose, but she was happy,—deeply if unaccountably happy. And the picture was a success. Her own face looked out at her from the canvas, her own warm gold-tinted colouring bloomed there, her own deep eyes brooded softly. There was her sensitive mouth, there her delicate chin and fine ear, there her broad forehead and that soft curve of cheek which made people love her.

“ You are a very great artist! ” she said, wonderingly. “ It is a marvellous picture.”

“ Do you think it is art which has done this? ” he said suddenly, his eyes growing very dark with passion. “ It is you, Signorina,—it is——”

He bowed his head, and fell a step back.

“ Signorina,—you know—what it—is,” he said.

The colour flooded the girl’s face, up to the warm brown of her hair.

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“Signor!” she exclaimed. And after a pause she repeated, in a changed and softened voice, “Signor!”

He looked at her steadily.

“Will you tell me your name, Signorina?” he asked.

“It is—Margherita,” she answered. “I—I cannot—I must not tell you the rest.”

“Yes, yes; I can understand. Margherita!—Margherita!—You are very wonderful, Signorina Margherita. I think you are more wonderful than any woman who ever lived before. It is because you are so wonderful, and so far beyond all other women and men, that I dare say something to you which brands me forever as mad. Come with me to the window for one moment.”

They stood together at the high window—the sky-fronting, northern window peculiar to studios. Below and above were roofs—red roofs, gray roofs, broken roofs, new roofs. Smoke curled faintly away here and there in graduated chains of haze. Trees and ivy were rustling faintly, singing a song that was very, very old. Down in a square a flock of doves circled a stone fountain, and

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some brightly dressed children sold spring flowers.

“For many years,” said the man, as they gazed, “I have looked out over the town and dreamed, but always with pain in remembering the past, and usually with a faint smothered hope for the future. Hereafter it will be different. My one joy will be in remembrance,—my one terror, the eternal loneliness of the days and years to come. I know that I am mad, Signorina, very mad: mad enough to have become new-born in a single day; mad enough, at this moment, to bar the door against the future which must come creeping in like cold mist. Mad enough even to—love you.”

The Princess made no answer. Was it only to-day that she had mourned the lack of incident in her life? Was it only two hours ago that she had come to the studio more in a spirit of careless, interested adventure than anything else? Was it indeed herself,—Margherita,—who now looked out of the high window and so quietly listened to this man tell her that he loved her?

“I love you,” repeated the man. “People do not usually love in two hours, do they?

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You are the most beautiful woman in the world, and the noblest, the truest. It has come to me suddenly, this strange thing they call love, and it is too late for me to seize it. I am too old, and too worn, and too utterly unworthy.” He bent his head.

“Why are you these things?” asked the Princess. “You do not speak truth; you are wrong. If you are old, it is not in years. If you are worn, it is not in heart. And if you are unworthy, it is not in the eyes of love—”

She stopped, growing white rather than red. The man looked at her.

“Tell me,” he said, “you are wise, as women are wise, sometimes. Am I a coward to tell you that I love you?—to tell you that I have waited for you all my life, and that if I might I would never let you go away again? If the gods let me, I would keep you near me, with me, in my arms forever and forever; and we would go forth together, you and I, and seek adventures, and love men and each other, and return thanks for the good green earth in our love. Am I a coward to say all this?”

“No,” she whispered, “you are not a

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coward. You make me happy. I, too, should like that to be so."

He caught her into his arms, and bending laid his lips on hers. She never knew how long they stood so. Only, in that space, she lived her entire life of love and joy and freedom, resting so in his arms, her brain stilled by his kiss and everything else shut out.

At last he lifted his head and let her slip from his arms. In a voice broken with sudden tears she said that she must go. The tears were gone as soon as they had come; the time for weeping was not yet,—not while she could still see him. And she put on her hat and arranged her veil, and came to him for good-bye. When he held her in his arms in that last moment, he cried out, as though in spite of himself, "Must it be?—Margherita, it shall not! You belong to me; I will not let you go."

"Hush!" she said, "I must. And I am content; I have lived."

Before she left the studio, she saw him draw a knife across the painting so that the head and figure were severed forever.

"I will paint a new Comedy," he said; "a smiling, mocking thing, knowing the values

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of life. This pictured face shall be my love and my wife for the rest of my days. Have no fear for me. I shall be a great man now, I believe."

So she went away and left him, with the complacent brown Buddha grinning on his dusty shelf among the shadows, and the last glimmering light lying faintly on the green and yellow tatters that clothed the Comedy on the easel.

Dusk was falling; the world had come to an end.

"Well!" snapped the duenna, between tears and rage, when the Princess was at home again, and the angry anxiety of the household had been assuaged, and the truant had been properly lectured, "and possibly you may be good enough to give an account of yourself! You went to mass,—good! Where have you been ever since?"

"I wandered about the streets," said the Princess, "in search of Romance and of Comedy." She stopped and laughed curiously. "I found them. Comedy!—My God!"

"Do not be blasphemous, Margherita," said the duenna. "I am sure I do not know

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what you mean. Do you mean you saw curious sights in the streets? A town like this is always full of odd happenings."

"Yes," said the Princess, "full of odd happenings."

Then she put her head down upon her arms and broke into sobs.

"Hush,—hush, *carrissima!*" cried the duenna, leaning over her in perturbation. "You are overtired, and no wonder. You see where your wildness leads you! However, we will say no more about that. I will bring you a cup of tea, *poverina*, and then you must rest. The Duke, your affianced, dines here to-night, and you must not be pale and red-eyed."

But the Princess sobbed on, unheeding.

"I said I was content," she was whispering, between her sobs, "but I am not,—I am not!"

THE WHITE GARDEN

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The White Garden



T was like a garden of snow,—such a garden as a disembodied spirit might have loved and tended, for only white flowers grew there. They bloomed, and fell asleep and came again with each bright spring,

—but they were all white. No colour ever stole in to jar the delicate monotone which made the garden; its purity was absolute, its beauty frail and unquestionable. To one who felt gardens to be among the warmest and sweetest of man's pleasures, and knew no shame in the happy riot of the senses in their riches, the wan loveliness of this garden would have seemed far too remote and colourless. But a nun, or a monk, grown accustomed to austerity in the emotions, would have been content there.

White snow-drops in early spring heralded the multiplied sweet profusion of the later

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flowers which soon filled the garden and gave joy to the bees and butterflies. There were all the many blossoms that make the flower-beds of old houses fragrant,—but only the white varieties. White sweet-peas, like little ghostly butterflies, fluttered there, and white carnations breathing an aromatic perfume too suggestive for their palour; white lilacs,—blossoms expressive of all the poetry and the music in nature's soul; pale hydrangias, and snowy hollyhocks that blew in the wind like spirits, and the rest of the sweet and innocent blooms that made up the White Garden. Then in June the air was delicious with the scent of the white roses, full and delicate and beautiful.

So the summer passed. Autumn is not a white season, so the garden went to sleep early, and rested, and perhaps drew new freshness and purity of tint from the snow which lay upon it all winter.

One morning in midsummer, the woman who owned and tended the garden stood in the midst of its waning sweetness and looked wistfully about her. The roses still lingered, and the hollyhocks and sweet-peas were at their fairest; but, for the most part, the gar-

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den's best time was passed. Spring was gone, and the white flowers would soon go too.

The woman was very beautiful in a pale and fragile fashion. She was slender, and stooped slightly as though under burdens too heavy for her. Her eyes were sad, but her mouth had the sweetness which only comes after much smiling through tears.

"It is like a bridal, my garden," she said to herself, and then with a sigh, "—or like a funeral; I hardly know which."

She plucked a cluster of small climbing roses from a hedge, and passed with them back to the house,—the quiet, white colonial house brooding with its Revolutionary memories over the garden. For ten years the house had been her home, yet she never quite understood it. Her poetic soul had grasped its beauty, however, and it had strangely fitted in to the new phase of her life and thoughts,—the phase which had just caused her to remodel the old, flaunting, overgrown, riotous garden, to weed out the colours, and to plant only white blossoms there.

"I have brought you flowers," she said,

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gently, as she came up between the pillars onto the verandah. The man who sat in the rocking-chair took the roses she brought and held them to his face with a peculiar intentness. He was blind.

“They have the breath of summer,” he commented. “Tell me,—is the garden beautiful this year, Anne?”

“It is—perfect,” she answered him, with a wistful, backward glance. “Try to see them through my eyes, Wilfred,—the delicacy, and the luxuriance——”

“And the colours,” he said, responsively.

“Yes,” she answered, steadily, “the lovely, warm, bright colours.”

“Your voice had a curious note, then,” he said, frowning a little. “Your tone is never quite true when you speak of your garden. You never seem to love it as most women love theirs. You always speak of it perfunctorily, with an effort. Is it that you do not really care for flowers?”

“So much!” she told him, speaking with seeming difficulty, “so much!”

He was silent for a moment, then spoke gently.

“Anne, you have been the most faithful

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and devoted wife that ever married a blind man and became his eyes and hands and brain. Yet there has always been a lack which I have felt."

"A lack, Wilfred?" Her voice rang with pain.

"Yes, dear. The lack of yourself. Since you came to me,—first the friend of my sister who died so soon afterward, then my consoler, finally my wife,—you have seemed to grow dearer and more necessary to me each day. Yet I have felt from the first that something, some part of yourself was held back. Your voice is sweet, but toneless, Anne, as though you spoke from a distance. Your touch is gentle, but restrained—controlled. Your presence affects me as the presence of a spirit—a shadow. Yet you love me, Anne,—I know it. What is it which makes you fear to be yourself with me?"

She pressed her hand upon her heart before she answered, and there was a look of fear in her eyes.

"Wilfred," she said, "I do love you. You know that; what else matters?"

"A great deal," he returned, with gentle

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promptness. "I was a faded, blind, worn man, Anne, when you came to me and loved me and became my wife. I was as cold and as stern as the rocks of a sea-shore. Yet I had lived, had moved in the world, had mixed with men and women, and I understand voices somewhat. I know how to read self-repression in a voice, for one thing. Yours rings with it, sobs with it, vibrates with it, Anne. What is it which your voice hides? I want to know the real Anne who has been far away, while my wife Anne has lived with me and ministered to me, these ten long years."

"No one can read another's heart truly," she said, steadily. "There is self-restraint even in the most perfect love and comprehension. You, Wilfred,—your heart is as much a mystery to me as mine to you."

He was silent for a minute, fingering the small white roses, while from each yellow calyx the pale petals fluttered now and then to the floor.

"That is true," he said, slowly. "There is something in my heart which you do not know, Anne. I will tell it to you, now, to-day, that I may do my part to remove

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this strange, cold barrier which is between us in spite of our love for each other."

"Wilfred," she interrupted, "tell me nothing; I need nothing. I know all about you that it is necessary for me to know. I love you. I am satisfied."

"You do not know this that I am about to tell you. You know that I am a good man, as the world considers it. You know that I was educated for the Church, and only gave it up because of 'scruples,'—much to my credit, the Bishop said. You know that I am a theologian of some rank, and that before my blindness I was a student who had won respect. You do not know——"

He drew a long breath. "You do not know that I was once for more than a year, the lover of a woman lost to all sense of good and of decency, that I followed her from place to place, her slave and adorer, that I gave her my soul and heart and all my sentiments and ambitions upon which to trample, and squandered upon her that which should by right have been my sister's,—and now yours. Men think little of these things in the world, but I have never been of the world and I know the depth of my shame."

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Strangely enough, the woman who heard him showed neither surprise nor agitation. Only upon her face grew an expression of overwhelming and helpless sadness.

“She cared nothing for me,” pursued the blind man, quietly. “But I loved her with all my soul, and would have died for her.”

“Who was she?” asked the woman, and when he answered she shivered.

“Her name was Anita Leicester, or so she called herself, and she was a singer. I heard her first in ‘Carmen’ and I adored her, passionately, irrevocably. I overturned all convention in order to see her. She encouraged me, poisoned my life with her cruel, tender sweetness,—let me believe that she loved me. I was young and a fool. I did not know that women could play at love like that, and venture into the deep, strong waters of passion—all for a game. I wrote to my Bishop, giving up all idea of entering the Church, because she had once laughed at my appointed calling.

“Then I found a note from her. She had gone, they said. I learned every word by heart in that one moment of misery. ‘Poor, good, religious boy!’ the note ran; ‘have I

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hurt you? I am sorry, for you were very charming, and I could almost have loved you. But we are as unlike as an eagle and a poor little foolish night-moth, fond of sweet flowers and bright lights. Go your ways and let me go mine. Good-bye! Anita.'"

The woman raised her hands and covered her face, but she made no sound.

"I returned to my sister," continued the blind man, tonelessly, "and entered once more upon my theological studies, though more as an intellectual occupation than because of any religious interest. That was dead. I have always considered my blindness the punishment for my sin."

His voice had grown hoarse and broken. As he clenched his hands the remains of the small white roses fell from them.

"I have been very frank, Anne," he said, slowly. "It has been the hardest task of my life. Perhaps I have done wrong in even mentioning before you the name of a woman like Anita Leicester. But I felt impelled——"

He said no more. His strength had failed him, and he now sat silent, waiting for her to speak.

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"I thank you," she said, very low, "for telling me—all—this. Though I am sorry, both for your pain, and also because— Oh, Wilfred, I, too, have had a burden to carry, deep down in my heart where it could only hurt me—and now it seems I must let it hurt you, too. Wilfred, did Phœbe—did your sister ever tell you how she met me? It was while we were both abroad, and we met—and her name interested me. Ah, how shall I tell it all? She showed me your picture,—the picture of the brother who was blind, she said. It was after that that she asked me to visit her, and I came back, and you know—the rest—" Her voice trailed off into silence.

"Yes, I know the rest, Anne. I remember Phœbe's letter from Nice about the beautiful, strange woman she had met,—so good and so charming. I remember your arrival. I remember you as Phœbe's loving friend—almost sister, even then. Why do you go into this, Anne?"

"Because—I have not the courage to go into the rest. Yet I must. My life was a strange one before I met Phœbe, Wilfred,— I have had much to expiate. When I came

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here and realized the peace and chastity and quiet of this old place I felt afraid, ashamed. I vowed to myself that I would purify my own soul until I became as nearly as possible like the Puritan-minded women who have lived here generation after generation. I strove with that in view; I shut out every temptation from my life and heart. Wilfred, there are no colours in my garden. The flowers are all white—white—white,—as I would have made my thoughts. This was one of my penances. Sometimes—ah, you do not know how I have struggled with my craving for sensuous things,—for light, and colour, and beauty, and music—”

“Anne!” he cried, “what has come to you? Your voice is new. It is like the voices I knew out there in the world, years ago. It says——”

She had risen to her feet, and suddenly she raised her hands with the swift, graceful gesture of an accomplished actress holding the centre of the stage. In every curve of her body spoke the woman accustomed to sway multitudes. Her chest expanded, her eyes glowed, and then softly, exquisitely, she began to sing.

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“*L’Amour est enfant de Bohème,*” she sang,—the inimitable, insolent confession of the faith of Carmen,—and as she sang her voice gained in strength and smoothness. It changed and softened and warmed and rose in power, until it seemed to have run through the entire gamut possible to the human voice. The blind man had risen slowly, and stood, grasping the back of his chair.

“*Prend garde à toi!*” challenged the beautiful, passionate voice, and then it broke and fell, ending in a sob.

“Anne!” he gasped, and then, in a burst of comprehension, “Anita! That was Anita’s voice!”

Tears sprang to her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. She stretched out her hands toward him, then drew them quickly back and pressed them against her face. When she spoke her voice was muffled, and marred by tears.

“I am Anita,” she said. “I loved you, and when I knew of your blindness I came to you. I have tried to make myself anew for your sake, for I knew how you despised and scorned me as I was. Now—you know; and I will go away.”

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“Anita!” he said, again, and she trembled and dropped her hands, for his voice was melodious with passionate joy, and his face was aflame,—transfigured.

“You — are — glad?” she managed to whisper.

“Glad!” he repeated, and now his voice was as hushed as her own. He took one step toward her and held out his arms.

“Come,” he said.

JUAN DE CASTRO'S GOLDEN WEEK

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Juan de Castro's Golden Week



HIS is a story of Havana, as it was some years since, when I was a boy there, Señor; —in the days when it was more isolated, more oppressed, more unhealthy and more picturesque than it is

to-day,—the days when the mail-steamers came only once in two weeks, and we could only cable Madrid via Key West. Eh, Señor, those, if you like, were good days,—good at least in the view of us young scoundrels, who were too wise to work if we could, too foolish if we would. We spent long days and nights in wine, women and song,—and tobacco!—we must not forget nicotine, Señor, the little cigarito, which is so good, so comforting, so inspiring to the imagination and the digestion. We were harmless for the most part; few of us had the wit to

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think of actual evil for ourselves. De Castro, though,—he, if you like, had brains—but brains! Truly I wonder at the brains of de Castro! He might have been very great had he been placed elsewhere than in our Habaña,—the place of blue skies and hot, steaming nights, and pretty, painted Cuban belles, and the cigarito. As it was, he was the greatest man in Havana. But you shall hear;—then, judge for yourself!

Juan de Castro, you must know, Señor, was very poor,—as poor as—well, as the rest of us! More could not be said. It was stated that he owed every tradesman in Havana, and there seemed no reasonable probability that he would ever pay them. He had affairs with every Señorita of note, and, half the time, did not seem to be expected to pay toll even in such light coin as jewels or flowers. Women loved him readily,—for his handsome eyes and his spendthrift ways, for his lithe figure and his white teeth, for his laugh, and his gay, imperious manner.

Those whom he loved were usually those of merry hearts and small minds,—those who ask not intentions, and can love for a month, a

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week, a day, or an hour as suits their pleasure. But there was one lady,—very high and grand and marvellously fair, a white-skinned Spanish maid and the daughter of a general,—and Juan loved her. She was called Isabella,—the rest of her name matters little,—and I myself will confess that she had a marvellous air, and eyes for which one could imagine a man's cherishing an abiding yearning and passion. She seldom glanced in Juan's direction, yet he gave her such whole-hearted adoration as the old Castilian poets used to sing of in immortal verse.

Often I have seen him look after her, as she passed, with a deep heart-hunger in his gaze which made me pity him; and then he would say: "Is she not beautiful,—but beautiful, Pedro? Beautiful, and pure and sweet! I love her, Pedro! Ah, I love her—love her!"

One day he followed her to mass, and again, and yet again. And at last—ah, I do not know how he had brought it about, but so it was!—he had succeeded in winning speech with her, and stood a fair chance, as I could see, for her favour. Then her

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father discovered something,—a perfectly innocent something it must have been,—a rose, or a verse written in the hasty hand of impatient love, and folded trianglewise. At all events, he quite properly took the Señorita to task, and put a stop to her going to mass alone.

So there was an end of it, and my heart ached for Juan, for he was badly hurt in this stupid and ungenerous tourney of love, and seemed now unable to support life save with such fortitude born of bitterness as cut me to see and countenance.

He went once to the General, determining to be so honest at least as to deserve honest treatment, and he must have plead his cause with some courage and wit, for the old gentleman heard him through. And, having heard, he did him the courtesy of saying respectfully, “I am sorry, Señor, that what you ask is out of the question. I would sacrifice anything to my daughter’s wishes except my daughter herself. You have nothing; the question is closed at the outset. I must ask you to excuse me from further discussion.”

Juan dwelt much on his trouble, and nothing seemed to console him. We took him to

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the bull-fight ;—an excellent fight it was too, really a battle, Señor, with much blood and many bulls and a celebrated Matador from Seville,—José Diaz was his name. But my poor friend looked on with a frown and left before the second bull met his death. He afterwards declared that he liked not the brute's bleeding shoulders. Now, I knew from this that his trouble was very heavy, for a man with Spanish or Cuban blood in him must indeed be in a dark way when he finds no pleasure in a bull-fight.

We next took him to see the last favourite dance. She was a full-throated, lithe-limbed creature, and the surprising absence of rouge on her cheeks was soon discounted by the deep red blood that flushed her delicate skin when she danced. Her steps were most seductive and her dress as alluringly insignificant as possible. Yet Juan looked gloomy and abstracted, and forgot to applaud.

One day he said to me :

“Pedro, I have put my ill-luck to one more test. I have bought a share in the big Madrid Lottery.”

“That is a foolish use to which to put good money,” I told him, tranquilly.

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Many men buy shares in the Madrid lotteries, each hoping to win the Capital Prize, which comes to forty thousand of your dollars, Señor. Yet in my long life-time I have met but three men who ever made money out of them. One had something to do with the running of one of them; the other two—But you shall judge for yourself how far the Madrid Lottery was concerned in the fortunes of de Castro and his friend Riccardo Bari.

“Eh, Pedro,” Juan laughed, rather bitterly, in answer to my comment, “but my money is not good money; there’s too little of it.”

“All money is good,” I declared,—which you know is a fact, Señor, however one may argue. “Two dollars are better than one, but one is very good.”

“And forty thousand is superlatively good,” drawled Juan, provokingly. “Pedro, my luck must turn!”

I glanced away from him to watch the new beauty,—the dancer we had seen recently,—drive by. She was assuredly very lovely, and very kind if report were accurate. She looked, I think, with more than a pass-

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ing interest at Juan, who hardly noticed her. That is the way with women, Señor. They will always turn away from the man who looks at them, to the man who keeps his eyes to himself. People will tell you it is pure feminine perversity; but I think it goes deeper than that, though I am no philosopher. I but argue from the old tale of Eve and the First Garden.

Something of the Beauty's present expression in passing us, I had once seen in Isabella's eyes, when they rested on him,—a look which included curiosity, interest, desire to comprehend, and a strange, half-wayward, half-tender yearning. People felt that way about Juan.

One night, it was soon after this, Juan and I sat at dinner in what we called the "Café Amo." It was alive with light and colour, for there were many pretty women there and much cigarette-smoke. The Beauty who had noticed Juan sat near us with Felipo de Lodia. She flaunted her gorgeous loveliness in our eyes as only a Cuban woman can, with a boldness which was quite inoffensive. Your women,—the Northern women,—cannot do that like ours, Señor.

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There is that in their slower and cooler blood which makes their coquetry less natural, less entrancing, and, I think, less delicate. This girl was like a child, or a graceful young wild thing, withal most curiously and prettily conscious of her beautiful self and her witchery.

She rolled her white arms, showing their curves, and widened her great eyes till they were big and deep and bright as moonlit water. Also she threw Juan a bright red flower from a cluster which pressed her bosom and lay vividly against her white skin.

Juan drank her health, of course, and Felipo de Lodia frowned. He was weak in body and mind and therefore jealous ; he was not a man of our sort and we had little enough to do with him or his sly ways. I have no patience with a man whose instinctive cowardice wards him away from danger, but who has neither the wit nor the grace to own himself wrong in time to save trouble.

Then came the event. A cablegram was handed Juan. He tore it open quickly, and I fancied at the moment that I saw his hand tremble. Upon reading it he sprang to his feet and flung it up in the air, catch-

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ing it again with a lunge as it fluttered past him.

“Drink to me, all of you!” he cried, at the top of his voice, “come, drink, I tell you! I have drawn the Capital Prize in Madrid—drink!”

Well, the place was pandemonium in a moment. Everyone loved Juan and everyone rejoiced in his change of luck. He was instantly surrounded by a wildly excited crowd, while congratulations rained thick and fast through the air, and drinks were passed around and his health was pledged again and again with a hearty good will. I alone was disturbed; I did not like the feverish gaiety of my friend’s manner, and I was incredulous, too, of the authenticity of the telegram. I had never heard, you see, of anyone’s winning anything through the Madrid lotteries, and I could hardly believe in this sudden surprising news. Still I could only accept the matter hopefully, and trust that poor Juan was not the victim of a mistake.

That night, on the strength of the word received, we proceeded to celebrate the occasion. We ordered more and more wine

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and liquor, and danced and sang and drank ; and we flatly refused to separate in spite of the protesting voice of the man who kept the "Café Amo" and was held responsible for its respectability. The Beauty had long since deserted de Lodia, who, in spite of his cowardice, had challenged Juan, and my friend in the most debonair manner possible had promised him satisfaction at de Lodia's own time and place.

Ah, Señor, sometimes, when one is very old, one feels again the long-silent, dare-devil clash of the pulses, and again everything grows pink and golden, as though seen through Burgundy and champagne. One's feet itch to dance, and one's voice longs to lift itself in some old drinking-round ! I can sometimes dream that I am again in the "Café Amo," with those other gay followers of folly and of youth, with wine in plenty, and music, fitful but infectious. Again I can see Juan, as handsome as a god, his dark hair ruffled and his face flushed, grasping his wine-glass as he looked amorouslly at the Beauty, who sat near him, every line in her figure breathing fascination. Eh, well ! We will not dwell on that.

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The picture is one which is perhaps better forgotten.

When dawn broke, gray and still, I was walking down the street toward my lodgings, wondering what was to come of this sudden change in de Castro's fortunes. Havana was barely stirring awake, and the languid dreariness which follows a night spent not wisely, however well, was heavy upon me, causing me to take a dark view of the future. Let it be stated here, however, Señor, that I had been, as ever, most abstemious!

My coffee and rolls were hardly finished that day, before Juan was with me, looking very white and rather grim. It was his way when he had been more than usually outrageous.

"Come around with me to the Bank," he said, slowly.

"Bank!" I gasped. The thought of Juan in close connection with the Havana Bank was too new not to be startling.

"Yes,—the Bank. Must I repeat it?"

"My nerves have come out better than yours," I informed him sweetly, as we left the room together, a few moments later.

"Nerves!" he repeated,—"nerves! Mine must stay by me now, such as they are!"

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Listen, Pedro! for only one thing have I—I mean, has this money come to me: to enable me to win Isabella. Her father will at least listen to me now. Do you not think so, Pedro?"

His voice was pitifully eager, like a child's.

"Yes," I assured him, "if he is disposed to like you, I think he will listen to you now."

"This—" went on Juan, "this will make it possible,—even easy perhaps—"

"M—yes," I observed. Then I could not help adding, "It was very considerate in Providence to think of that, wasn't it?"

He looked at me sharply, even suspiciously, but he said nothing. We were already at the Bank.

Let me tell you briefly, Señor, that Juan interviewed the Bank President and tried to induce him to look upon the cable message in the light of a draft, and to cash it. The Bank President smiled kindly,—Juan looked very handsome that day, and was young enough to be the Bank President's son,—and said quietly:

"I think, Señor, that we will wait until the mail-steamer comes in to corroborate your news. There may be a mistake, you know."

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“But that is a week off!”

“True; but is a week long to wait for forty thousand dollars?” asked the Bank President.

“But, Señor President, I am hard put to it,—I need the money! Ah, I have it! Will you not cable, yourself, to Madrid, and find out the number of the ticket which drew the Capital Prize? Find it out from headquarters, Señor President,—would not that do?”

“That would be conclusive, certainly,” admitted the Bank President, thoughtfully. He ruminated for a few minutes, then glanced at Juan’s handsome eager face, and smiled once more.

“I will cable Madrid,” he said, “and I will also have the advice of some of my Directors. Leave the number of your ticket with me, and your address.”

Juan became voluble with gratitude, the Bank President became frigid in proportion to his volubility, and we departed.

I was surprised at the turn matters were taking,—I admit I had doubted the authenticity of that message. I was still more surprised when the Bank President notified us next day that they had cabled Madrid and

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that the answer was satisfactory. Señor de Castro's number had drawn the Capital Prize; Señor de Castro would be permitted by courtesy to receive the sum he had won, from the Bank, in advance. There was a little legal bother in the matter,—Juan being obliged to pledge himself to make over his checque when he received it, to the Bank, etc. I probably have that all wrong, Señor, I never had a head for business. I never thought Juan had, either; but it seems that in that, as in many other matters in the course of my life, I was mistaken.

Juan was rather grave when we came out of the Bank together, the money securely packed in a small bag in his hand. He had chosen to have it in cash,—“having debts to settle,” he explained cheerfully. I noticed his quiet manner, and respected him for it. Evidently he was accepting the responsibilities of his recently acquired possession in a serious spirit.

That day he wrote a letter to the General, Isabella's father, and we both waited in great anxiety for the reply. Juan was so nervous that he hardly hoped for a favourable one, but, for me, I felt that his chance

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was good. His letter was a particularly manly one, and the old General could appreciate good courage and straight speaking, as he had proved. Juan had not overestimated in his letter the possibilities of forty thousand dollars, but he had stated that sum as being available immediately, and had expressed his intention of getting into some serious work at once. With that for capital, something ought to be done; this was his plea. Meanwhile, he asked to be permitted to see the General and the Señorita Isabella from time to time, and to once more plead his case in person,—which he hoped he would be better able to do than on paper. Something to this effect he said, but it was put in a frank, eager way which I should find it difficult to copy. Juan was very much a boy at times, and some of that odd boyishness of his, together with a fair allowance of clear-minded, strong-hearted manliness, went into that letter.

The General evidently liked the letter and did not feel inclined to entirely ignore the alteration in conditions. He did not, in his reply, actually mention the Capital Prize, but he expressed himself as being willing to

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reconsider the unqualified nature of his answer to Señor de Castro a short time before. His daughter's happiness was very dear to him, and she had been able to convince him in what direction it lay. If Señor de Castro would call on the General that evening they might approach a better understanding of the situation and of one another. It was a very diplomatic, guarded letter, but I thought I could read in it a certain rather touching note of affection for his daughter. It seemed as though the old man had become convinced of the importance of Juan to his daughter's contentment of life, and seized,—albeit with a semblance of decent hesitation,—the first chance offered him to make matters straight, and to promote the girl's happiness. He was an old man and not a hard one, save at times, and Isabella was an only daughter, with a pale cold way of clinging to her own secret grief, more potent to one who loved her than the storming of a virago.

Juan held the note for some minutes in his hand and stared at it with a strange look which had in it, it seemed to me, quite as much of sorrow as of joy. Then he asked me to go for a walk with him, and we went

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accordingly. How warm the sun was that day! I often think of it. And the streets were fuller of people than was usual at the hour. There was an element of festivity, of good cheer which permeated one as one walked,—and the air,—ah! the air was a caress.

“How is the Beauty?” I asked, after a time, to bring a gayer element into his too serious thoughts. He started a little and flushed,—I thought with a touch of shame or of regret.

“I have not seen her since that night,” he told me, simply enough. In my own mind, I meditated quietly upon the righteous, or unrighteous, rage of the Beauty if this were true, but I did not attempt further levity.

“Now,” said Juan, very softly, after a silence with which I was well enough pleased having many things to look at and think upon, “now begins the Golden Week, Pedro,—the week with every moment shod as brightly with gold as I can make it. If the Fates give me no more than this one week,—faith! I’ll see to it that it is full measure.”

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Something in his voice disturbed me, for I could not understand it. But if I allowed myself to be anxious over the many things in life that I do not understand, I should have a weary lot, Señor, so I put that matter out of my head and worried no more concerning it,—at the time!

The week,—the Golden Week as I shall always call it,—slipped by all too quickly for the lovers. The General, having permitted Juan a footing of sufferance, soon found that matters were beyond his control, had he wished to stop them. The two young people were foolishly, madly happy. I cannot help a certain resentment which enters my heart whenever I see such joy,—a resentment not against them, God knows,—but against Fate, Señor, who never seems able to let well alone, and must always have a finger in the most toothsome pies. It seems a pity,—does it not, Señor?—that Grief and Separation and such odious night-hags seem irresistibly attracted to the happy and smiling young Love God. They can't leave the pretty sprite alone, it seems. Ah, well! this is not a place in which to let one's private regrets and grudges creep in,

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though we know what they are,—eh, Señor?

Juan's face became filled with joy, yet a joy as strangely new as it was strangely serious. I realized now that he heartily and even bitterly regretted his past follies and dissipations,—most of all his excesses on that night when he had first received word from Madrid. This novel attitude on his part seemed to put my friend far away on a pinnacle by himself, and I sometimes felt strangely and sadly shut out from his present exalted gladness and gravity. Yet now and then a curious hard grim look leaped momentarily to his eyes, a look calculating yet reckless. Had I seen that look at a gaming-table I should have said: "There is one who has wagered everything. If he wins he will be rich for life. If he loses, he will kill himself."

The hot golden days and the hot silver nights came and passed. Those two dreamed away their time of good fortune with pathetic concentration of love and rapture. Each morning Juan went to his lady with a flush of expectation on his face, each night he returned with a sort of hush about him wonderful to note. And suddenly the week had

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gone, and it was the day before the arrival of the mail-steamer. And on that day Juan came to me very white indeed, and told me that something had happened which brought matters to a crisis.

“What do you mean?” I said, rather testily, for he spoke significantly and I distrust riddles.

“I cannot tell you exactly what I mean—now,” said Juan, whiter than ever. “You will know soon enough. But this I can tell you. I must hurry matters,—I must bind Isabella to me forever, and I must do it quickly.”

“Are you quite mad?” I asked.

“I do not think so,—at least not at present. Perhaps I shall be before I reach the end of this. Only one thing remains clear in my mind; Isabella must be my wife to-night.”

He spoke passionately, feverishly and with a note of panic in his voice. I stared at him, doing my best to understand.

“You are going to marry the Señorita to-day?” I asked him, at last, calmly. When one is quite dazed one is of necessity calm, all emotion being out of the question.

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“I am.” He spoke definitely, and straightened up as he said it.

“Does she know it?”

“No. But she will marry me.”

I looked at him and shook my head bewildered. Yet I was bound to acknowledge to myself that, as he looked then, he might carry that or any other point.

And, as a matter of fact, by some reasoning or lover-like lack of reasoning, he did win Señorita Isabella’s consent to this mad and ill-timed marriage. At sun-down she was going to mass. He would join her and they would be married. The old General was not to know until the next day, or such time as Isabella chose to divulge it,—but Juan argued, I do not doubt, that he would not be too angry with them, having already shown much indulgence and leniency. In any case, Isabella was to be Isabella de Castro by nightfall. When Juan told me this his face flushed deeply, and a look came into his eyes which was a new surprise to me. “And—to-morrow,” he added, almost inarticulately, “I shall not care what happens. Pedro!—she will be my wife—to-night!”

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Quite like Romeo and Juliet, poor things!—quite like Romeo and Juliet. At this late date I cannot seem to remember whether or not the traditional rope-ladder was added to the preparations. I am inclined to think that it must have been.

“She will be my wife—to-night!” had murmured Juan, in the mock-omnipotence of love. But the good God adjusts our plans, Señor, to suit His sublime judgment. Undoubtedly it is for the best, but it is apt to be exasperating.

Felipo de Lodia, who had apparently been fabricating a fictitious courage during the past week, chose this day to arrange his long-deferred duel with Juan,—the duel in connection with the Beauty. I will still call her so, Señor,—’tis a title widely applicable in Cuba, and therefore does her no injury. I am told that she has since become so respectable that it would look like shocking impertinence on my part to mention her name together with a duel in Havana, and when a woman has the good sense to keep her own eccentric affairs to herself, she deserves encouragement.

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Juan received Felipo de Lodia's challenge with a stony face, and told the second who brought it that he had an engagement for the hour, just before sun-down, appointed by de Lodia. The man dared, to my disgust, say something about the convenience of some engagements, which, also to my disgust, settled the matter. Juan said, of course, that it would give him the greatest possible pleasure to run through Señor de Lodia at the time suggested, and to run through his second afterward. Indeed, he declared, suavely, the temptation was so great that he would postpone his engagement rather than run the risk of losing the opportunity altogether. He realized, he ended with a malicious inflection, that it might not be offered him again!

The man went out, angry enough with his reception, I do not doubt, and I cannot in the least blame him. As soon as we were alone Juan turned to me with a curious smile. He said nothing but I burst out,—“It is an abominable shame!” hotly sympathetic. Where was the proposed marriage with Isabella, where the Romeo and Juliet romance, where the rope-ladder? Juan

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would have to keep in retirement for a few days even if he were so discreet as to merely wound de Lodia slightly. Blindly I realized, while seeing no cause, that Juan had had some great and definite reason for wishing the marriage to take place that night; so blindly I pitied him, and condoled with him in the witless way of friends.

“No,” he said, “it is only fate. It has——” He stopped suddenly, and, after a short moment of hesitation, ended, “it has saved me, Pedro, from the greatest wrong of all the many great wrongs the reckoning for which I must soon meet.”

He wrote a few letters after that, and then went out alone, though it was in the hot hours of the siesta. I went back to my own quarters and did not see him until late in the afternoon, when he came in looking rather worn as to face, but with a hard, cool look about his mouth which I knew yet did not know. We went together to the place de Lodia had appointed. It was a wonderful afternoon with a special and rare brilliancy upon everything and a heavy sweetness in the air.

The duel was a swift one, and as pretty as

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anything of the kind which I have ever seen. Juan wounded de Lodia very soon, though in truth he really let his adversary play about untouched for several minutes out of pure courtesy. The wound was a slight one, but enough, we all decided, and he and I strolled homeward just as the sun dropped down out of sight.

When I suggested that a trip into the country for a day or two might be expedient he shook his head. When I further mentioned the hour and remarked that he might still join Isabella at mass, he almost turned on me.

“God, man!” he cried, “don’t you see? I came to my senses in time. I sent her word concerning the duel, and put the temptation behind me. Are you Satan yourself that you revive it again?”

Satan himself! I put it to you, Señor, was that friendly or grateful? However, he quickly apologized, and I could not bear malice where Juan was concerned. Still, I felt dejected and utterly at sea, I frankly confess.

“Pedro,” he said, at last, “you may have known that I was a scoundrel, but perhaps you never suspected that I was an out-and-

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out blackguard and an out-and-out thief. Come with me to the Bank and see me prove myself both."

Now, I knew by his voice just how serious this matter was to be, so I went trembling. I had no doubt of his villainy, Señor, for I believed in his estimate of himself; but I loved him.

We were shown into the Bank President's private office. I was shaking, but Juan was quite cool.

"Señor President," he said, as the older man, smiling kindly, looked up at him, "I have come to break to you bad news,—very bad news."

"What news, Señor?" asked the President, smiling still.

"It is this," said Juan; "that I have not the smallest idea that my number drew the Capital Prize in Madrid——"

The President leaped to his feet.

"What are you talking about?" he cried.

"Of course, it is possible that it has," continued Juan, "but I think it is one of the most unlikely possibilities in the world. I have not the faintest knowledge as to what number did come out ahead, but it would

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be hardly short of miraculous if it were mine."

The Bank President looked at him with a frozen gaze.

"I think you must have gone mad," he said. "Do you not know that every precaution was taken to verify the fact? We cabled——"

"Yes, Señor President. And my accomplice is Riccardo Bari, the operator at Key West. You see the matter lay easily in his hands. His work consisted in the management of one small detail. Your cable went through all right, asking for the number which had drawn the Prize. When he received the answer from Madrid, he merely changed the number cited to the number of my ticket, and repeated the message duly with that one small, undiscoverable alteration."

The Bank President and I were almost equally paralyzed; but I think he felt worst. We both waited, seeing that further statements were to follow from this surprising man who stood there, rather white but quite immovable, and confessed his fraud with complete coolness and lack of embarrassment.

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"I have looked up Spanish law in Cuba, Señor President," pursued Juan, "and I find that the penalty for obtaining money under false pretenses is fifteen years imprisonment. My friend Bari and I are quite prepared to go. I have been settling my affairs with that end in view, and I can answer for him that he will make no effort to leave Key West before the officers reach there."

"Where is the money?" burst from the Bank President, with extreme violence.

"Quite safe, Señor President, in the hands of Bari's friends, where we can easily obtain it at the end of our terms of imprisonment."

The President leaned forward and moistened his dry lips. Twice he tried to speak in vain, then with an air of proposing a business transaction he said:

"If you will give up that money this matter shall never reach the ears of the police."

"You do not understand, Señor President. If we were afraid of arrest why did we not escape with the money instead of confessing it? We planned this long ago, Bari and I. We agreed that the life of criminals in hiding would be unpleasing to us,—to me particu-

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larly. Bari would have been willing to have taken his chances, I think. This is entirely my own plan, but he fully agrees to it, and it would be unfair for me to back out now, after having induced him to enter the game with me."

The President, rather pale and exceedingly blank as to expression, stared at him.

"Good God, man!" he said, "you are a gentleman; what made you invent such a damnable fraud as this?"

A sudden, very hot colour stained my friend's face, but he said not one word. I caught his arm.

"Juan, give it up," I besought, almost beside myself, "you are no thief!"

"You neither of you seem to understand," he said, dully. "Bari has risked everything to have this money, fifteen years hence at the latest. He wants to come out then and find his money waiting for him to use, not as a thief, but as a man who has honestly paid the penalty and worked for his fortune."

The Bank President fell back in his chair and raised a futile hand toward Heaven.

"Merciful powers," he muttered, weakly, —quite beyond connected, much less elabo-

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rate speech,—“The reasoning!—Great God!—His reasoning!—His preposterous, infernal reasoning!” Words failed him.

“I have risked everything,” went on Juan, quietly, “for one week’s chance. I would do it again for this short, golden week. It was worth it all and I do not regret my part in it.” He was looking at me. He knew that I would understand his unspoken reference to Isabella. “I wanted a chance,—I had it, and I took it. Had it not been for de Lodia, Pedro, I should have taken more than was mine by right—to-night. I should have married her...married to a felon!” He had quite forgotten the Bank President. “One thing, Pedro, I will swear to you. When I come out—of prison, I shall never,—so help me Heaven!—touch one penny of that damnable money.”

The Bank President in all his trouble stared at him with an amazement which wavered between curiosity and a perverse admiration.

“You are the most extraordinary fellow that the Lord ever made,” he remarked. “You seem to have committed a felony for the sake of possessing a large sum of money

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for one week. You are now going to prison for it, on your own voluntary confession, and you are swearing never to touch a penny of it when you are free, after all!"

Juan's expression, as he looked at him, I can only term acknowledgment.

"I think you are beginning to understand," he said. "I had intended to use that money when I was free, Señor President. It was my plan,—a villain's plan, villainously executed. But—Señor, since last week I have become betrothed to a lady. But for a strange chance I should be her bridegroom to-night. Can you understand better now?"

The President's face was astonishingly comprehending.

"Yes," he said, "I think I can. You have paid a great price, Señor, for your golden week, as you call it,—fifteen years of freedom, and your share of forty thousand dollars! So you cannot be induced or bribed to give the money up?"

"It was my plan,—I keep to it," said Juan, briefly. "Anything else would be unfair to Riccardo Bari, as well as cowardly on my part. I am not a coward, Señor, if I am a criminal. I am quite ready to pay."

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Juan wrote one very short note to the Señorita Isabella, and in it he stated the case. He was certain, and even I believed, that she would send him some message of love and absolution before he went to prison. But you cannot trust those snow-white, high-born, cold-featured women, Señor, when it comes to emergencies. She returned his note with a vehement "Farewell" dashed across it,—and nothing more.

The Beauty behaved differently. When Juan was taken to jail there was a violent feeling of resentment among his friends. His departure was made a triumphal procession, and among those who pressed to see him was the Beauty. She kissed her hands to him, not coquettishly but passionately, and her face was disfigured by tears. But Juan hardly seemed to see her. His eyes, hungry and tragic, lifted themselves to the Señorita's window as he passed under it. She might, I thought, have waved to him, but no,—there was not a sign of her.

So he went on; and it was to have been the first morning after his marriage, too! Ah, well, Señor, life is a queer thing, and it is better not to think about it too much.

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The Beauty married, ten years later, and is a great lady now, but I have heard that she has never forgotten de Castro. To my mind, her's was the better love,—warmer, more comforting, and less fatally clear of sight. Indeed, perhaps the true clarity of vision is a tender blindness, Señor,—who can say?

In due time Juan came out of prison, and made a fair living, but he never would touch a penny of those ill-gotten gains. Bari is out too,—a rich man, of course. And Isabella? Oh, she married de Castro; declares that she went into conventional retirement until he was freed. Well, Juan has what he wishes,—though I always preferred the Beauty, poor soul!—and I suppose, under the circumstances, he does not even now grudge the price he paid for his Golden Week and what it brought him. As for his wife, no woman who has Juan would change places with our Regent!—a rare fellow with women is Juan.

I have told a long tale, Señor! But when one lets oneself drift back into those old days, one forgets how to be brief and to the point! They were good days,—good days, Señor! But they are all gone.

**“AND IN THE FIRE
OF SPRING”**

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“And in the Fire of Spring”

“



O you will not return to Paris for the present? Not even though it is May, the height of the season?"

"No; I am growing so young again, I have no wish to leave—Olympus, may I call it? The

atmosphere is so very Greek, it suggests Olympus!"

Mme. Lefévre smiled her wistful, fleeting smile, as her long fingers shaped the red wax which littered her modelling-table. She was tall and very slender, and her hair was softly-blended flaxen and gray. She owned to thirty-seven, but she did not look more than thirty.

"Ah, well," she said, "Olympus is glad that you will stay. Sometimes we grow lonely among the gods."

Her metaphor was not too far-fetched nor

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inapplicable, for casts in marble and plaster glimmered all about the room, and seemed to dream of the Golden Age and ancient Greece. The room was large and dim and cool, and through it blew breezes fresh from the sea. The two broad, open windows were framed in the hanging clusters of a wistaria vine that climbed and twined outside. Though salt air and measured surf-notes bespoke the near presence of the ocean, there was no glimpse of it through the window. Mme. Lefévre lived high on the cliffs, and from where the two sat the horizon-line was invisible. The only outlook was the pale blue sky,—two great squares of infinite faint-hued space, framed in the hanging wistaria blooms.

Mme. Lefévre's companion's eyes included windows, room and graceful occupant in a long panoramic glance full of conscious satisfaction, and luxurious content. He was an angular man, a trifle worn, a trifle gray, with just a touch of cynicism in his mouth, dispelled at intervals by his slow but not unkindly smile, a man with clean-cut features, and uncommunicative gray eyes.

Paul Carthier, the successful banker, was rusticating near the sea. His luck, as usual

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beneficent, had given him letters to Mme. Lefévre, a rich, beautiful and eccentric widow, who lived, modelled and read in a lonely house on lonely cliffs, and who, before she abandoned the world and its ways, had been one of the most charming of Parisian belles. They understood each other, the graceful woman,—with the piquant silver touches in her fair hair, which looked as though they had been put there by a powder-puff to enhance her fairness,—and the world-weary man. How or why they should be in sympathy, they never knew, but from the beginning Paul Carthier had rejoiced in a sense of rest and comfortable absence of discord or effort, which always seemed to greet him at the door of Mme. Lefévre's work-room. And, on her part, she liked to listen to his keen, careless views of men and things, she liked to see the world again in his crisp and vivid utterance; and his appreciation of herself and her surroundings was pleasant to her.

She was not a "professional sculptress," as she often explained, and merely toyed with the classic art with her slender, graceful fingers. Carthier was glad that she was

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not too great, and did not take her ambitions too seriously. The room in which they sat was undeniably the room of one to whom beauty was a passion, in any case, and with a distinct sensation of delight he noted the splendid bare spaces where the big white gods were fitly honoured, and were not forced to suffer the indignity of ignoble companionship. No "bric-à-brac," no modern art, no "ornaments" desecrated the room. Mme. Lefévre was Asiatic in her belief that one beautiful thing at a time was as much as man's limited appreciation could adequately grasp.

"It would be wicked not to be young and happy to-day," said Carthier. "It is May, Madame!—May, and the sun is shining outside!"

"Ah, to be sure," she said lightly, "it is May. Even the old grow young again in May. It is only the dead—" She checked herself. "It is hard that the access of strength should not mean the access of peace," she mused aloud.

Carthier looked at her enquiringly.

"I mean," she pursued, "that this infusion of light and life which enters the veins in spring should bring with it the repose of

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power, instead of warring impulses, and beating blood."

Carthier laughed.

"Had you ever 'warring impulses' in your life?" he asked, audaciously.

"I? I am full of them,—far too full of them for a quiet, lonely lady approaching middle life!" She laughed softly, and lightly pressed the wax she held into the delicate semblance of a face. In her odd, touching voice she quoted as though to her own inner ears:

"'Come,—fill the Cup and in the Fire of Spring,
Your Winter Garment of Repentance fling.
The Bird of Time has but a little way
To fly, and lo! the Bird is on the Wing!'"

"'Your winter garment of repentance!'" repeated Carthier. "Repentance—penance! Do you believe in hidden penance?"

"Surely."

"I mean penance in the mind, the soul. Not fasting nor yet prayer, but that inner scourging which is caused not from a sense of religion but of justice. At intervals, I repair to some inner Inquisition and ask myself whether or not I am fit to mix with my fellow men!"

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“How dark a record you must have!” She laughed, but she looked more attentive than before.

“Once upon a time,” said Carthier, speaking in a very casual manner, “a man asked me for help and I refused it. He was a blackguard, but, as I found out afterward, he happened to be in extreme need, and I was—or had been—his friend, you see. He came to me to borrow the money that was to save him from ruin. I did not believe his story; I had heard it very often from his lips and, after yielding, had very often found that what I had let him have had gone—well, I would rather not mention how. I refused, and, I think, put it rather brutally. He besought me again, more pressingly; I ordered him out. Next day he shot himself.”

Mme. Lefévre very softly pushed away the lumps of red wax, and stared at him.

“The broken sword; and the piece fits—the piece fits,” she whispered, enigmatically. Aloud she said:

“Your ‘winter garment of repentance’ is a heavy and burdensome one, Monsieur. It is, I admit, a very serious sin to withhold one’s hand from the friend who appeals to one.”

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Carthier flushed, painfully; his eyes seemed pleading for more gentle censure. But he said no word. Mme. Lefévre sat motionless, her elbows upon the modelling-table, her chin upon her white hands, her eyes cast down.

“So this soft spring season does not bring a uniform peace,” she said, as though she pondered deeply. “You have remorse, and I—perhaps, Monsieur, your special act of cruelty affects me the more deeply because it calls to mind an episode in my own life the memory of which will always be a hard one. I was betrothed, Monsieur, when I was very young, to the man I loved—rare, indeed, among French girls, but my parents desired my happiness above all things. The engagement was not known outside the family, but would be soon. One day my father came to me and told me that my lover was ruined, disgraced, and that I could never see him again. I demanded speech with him; it was finally allowed me. He came—he talked to me for the last time. He was in debt, he had no way of getting out of it—he was hopeless. He had appealed to a man, a friend, who was in a position to help

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him. The friend had refused. My poor boy clasped me in his arms for good-bye, after telling me this, and rushed from the house. Next day he killed himself."

She spoke very calmly and quietly, and still patted the red wax. Only in a curious hard look about her lips was it possible to read her intimate suffering in the brief tragedy she had related.

"A sad little story, Monsieur, is it not?" she continued. "It is all my romance. Shortly after I made the usual marriage of convenience. M. Lefévre was a good man; when he died I came here to live. Only one definite desire remains in my heart, Monsieur. I want to see the man who refused my lover the help so entirely in his power to give. I hated him—I hated him. To-day I hate him still."

She spoke tranquilly, but her eyes were quite implacable.

"What a good hater!" said Carthier, half jestingly. "And is it all to no purpose? Have you no clue to his identity?"

"I never heard his name—but I have vowed to find him, and God respects and aids a vow like that. My God is the God of the Scrip-

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tures. Some day my enemy will be placed in my power,—I do not know how, but God knows. I shall be able to hurt him, through his love or his ambition or his remorse or his pride—the way will be pointed out to me, and I shall have power to punish him. I have prayed, and God will not remain deaf forever."

Something in her voice and quiet bearing chilled her listener strangely. How calm she was!—how exquisite!—and how wonderfully stern in her half Pagan, half fanatical determination.

"Do you know," he said, "that there is something primitive and savage about you at this moment? You, who in some ways are the last breath of civilized and delicate womanhood!"

"Many of us are in reality primitive," she responded, tranquilly. "We wear well-built clothes if we are men, and Paquin gowns if we are women, but in our hearts we are as naked as Aphrodite there, or Apollo, or Bacchus——" she indicated the glimmering white shapes about them.

"You are hard," he said, quietly. "I would have sworn you were as gentle and as fine

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as your wistaria blowing about in the wind outside the window. But you are hard. Surely one may forget one's old grudges in May."

She shook her head.

Then she slowly loosened from a long chain about her neck upon which dangled various metal and jewelled objects, a tiny silver cross.

"I gave this to—him—when we were betrothed," she said. "When he died some one, kinder than the others, sent it back to me. I think, at the very last, when—they found him,—he asked them to. There was a little drop of blood dried onto it,—it had been in his pocket, you see, and the pistol... I have kept it close to my heart these twelve years, and I have told it in the name of our love, his and mine, that I would never rest or know happiness until that man was in my power."

She sat silent, holding the little cross in her fingers.

"And you love him still?" asked Carthier, very gently. His heart gave a throb of pain, as he spoke. What love—what love! he thought, within his soul. Had the dead

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boy been worth it? he wondered. Probably better worth it than— He bowed his head.

“ You have no right to ask,” she said, very white. “ He was my lover—I vowed—” Her voice was broken. “ That is enough! ” she ended, almost fiercely.

“ How will you find the man you have vowed to punish? ” asked Carthier, with a weary realization that he must carry the talk beyond dangerous personalities. To his surprise she leaned forward and looked with an odd, searching stare straight into his eyes.

“ Monsieur,” she said, deliberately, “ have you ever heard the story of Iseult of Ireland? Her betrothed, Morold, was slain by a knight whom she had never seen, and who mockingly sent home to her the severed head of her lover. She preserved the splinter of steel which she found imbedded in the skull and sought near and far for the sword with a nick in the blade into which that sliver would exactly fit. At last, in a blade which lay at the bedside of a wounded minstrel whom she was tending, she found a broken place, and the piece of steel fitted into it.”

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"Yes, I have heard the story," said Carthier. "Well, and do you expect to find your enemy by the same means?" He smiled.

"No, Monsieur, because I have already found him."

Carthier looked at her, but half comprehending.

"The name of the man to whom I was betrothed was Gaston de Gris," cried Mme. Lefevre, in a clear voice.

Carthier started upright.

"Is it possible?" he gasped. "Good heavens! De Gris!"

"The piece fits, Monsieur, the piece fits!" she said, facing him. Then she hid her face in her hands. "You!" she murmured, brokenly,—"it was you who failed him. My enemy!—you!"

In the silence that followed Carthier came one step nearer to her, and then stopped short, clenching his hands in the impotence of his position. Outside the waves could be heard faintly, lapping—lapping, at the foot of the cliff. A fisherman, just pushing off, sang a love-song in a minor key; it was a queer, sobbing, uneven thing, with a sea-lilt in it.

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“Madame,” at last said Carthier, very low, “you have been praying God for revenge these past twelve years—it is in your hands. You have asked that the man whom you hated should be placed in your power; he is here, Madame. And I will tell you how to wound and punish him: in his—” His voice broke, and he paused.

“In his love for you, Madame,” he ended, simply.

Mme. Lefévre started as though in horror. She caught up the little silver cross, and pressed it convulsively to her heart; on her lips was an unspoken prayer.

“Do not stop me,” continued Carthier, softly and gravely, “I am trying to show you that my punishment is even greater than any which you could devise. To know that you have in your heart a grave to love and weep over, to know that you are predisposed, in any case, to hate me,—to know—Ah, Madame! You have not prayed to the good God in vain. Truly your God is the God of the Scriptures, and is not deaf forever.” His voice was very bitter as he spoke the last words.

The refrain of the fisherman’s love-song

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floated inland like a ghost of sound. And the waves were still lapping—lapping against the foot of the cliff. In through the open windows,—the broad windows framed in clustering wistaria-blooms that moved in shadowy silhouettes against the pale blue sky,—blew the salt wind. And all about, stood the kindly white deities, smiling for the most part, as though they watched a comedy. Who should know better than they the things that count and that do not?

Suddenly Mme. Lefévre flung the little silver cross from her, and burst into a passion of tears.

“It is too late to change—my whole life,” she cried, brokenly, her face hidden in her hands, “you are asking me to forget—everything.”

Carthier started violently, and the blood poured into his face. Yet he steadied his voice and did not advance one step closer to her.

“I am asking you—nothing, Madame,” he said. “I am—asking—you—nothing. I am only telling you that—I love you.”

Then he stood, breathless, and awaited his sentence.

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"Ah!" murmured Mme. Lefévre, drawing her hands away from her tear-stained face. "You said, Monsieur, that spring could make even the old young. But if one has been—dead—these many years?"

Carthier was at her side.

"It is the season of resurrection," he whispered.

A N E X P E R I M E N T I N S O U L S



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An Experiment in Souls



"UNDoubtedly the boy can sing, but he has no soul. Truly he is but a Necker such as the poets sing of. He was born without a soul!"

So spoke the Master, with a petulance most unprecedented. The Master was not wont to take so much heed to his pupils, nor to their souls, and his sister raised her eyes toward him in slight amazement. Madame Perrinat, the Master' sister and assistant, was beautiful. Further, she was intensely artistic, and quite unscrupulous. Yet she was not a bad woman, which is a paradox, yet truthful.

"*Tiens, Philippe,*" she remarked, sensibly, answering her brother's testiness. "Get him a soul."

"And where, I ask you?" demanded the Maître Philippe, with a rising inflection.

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“Where does one find a factory where they manufacture souls?”

Madame stretched herself, and half closed her sleepy dark eyes.

“You have spoken of the Necker, *mon frère*,—you remember how the Necker always found a soul?—Through love!—Ah, yes, truly! *Alors*, let the boy fall in love.”

The Master laughed, his rare deep laugh. “*Bien*,—that is a good idea, Françoise! With whom, then? Not Liselle?”

Madame laughed shrilly. Liselle was their convent-bred niece, a little pale wisp of a thing, with reddish hair and not the dimmest comprehension of art nor of life. Love and Liselle!—Madame laughed for some moments.

Suddenly her laughter broke on her lips into a silence which made the Master look at her. She seemed to be considering something quite new, and her face was grave.

“Of what are you thinking, Françoise?” asked the Master, anxiously.

“I am thinking,” said Madame, slowly, “that I like experiments. And an experiment in souls—*Dieu!* There would be some excitement there!” A light leaped into her

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eyes. "What if I undertake it, this experiment?" she cried, quickly. "What if I give the boy his soul?"

The Master stared at her.

"You—Françoise! You are fifteen years older than he! Also, it is dangerous, experimenting with souls. Suppose in giving one to him, you should play havoc with your own?"

Madame laughed recklessly.

"I will take the risk, I," she exclaimed. "*Bien, Philippe*,—I undertake it, this experiment in souls!"

The Master raised his hand hastily.

"It is Jeannot himself who comes," he said.

A slender, yellow-haired boy, older in reality than he looked, came in laughing. He was Jean de Bonfoi, known to his intimates as Jeannot, and he was the son of one of the Master's old friends. Jeannot's marvellous tenor voice was only less remarkable than his extraordinary absence of responsibility, of gravity, of sentiment. The Master had said well,—the boy had no soul. Or if a soul lurked somewhere behind those boyish yet mocking eyes, it had not yet

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raised its wings,—not yet made itself known.

It was time for the morning singing lesson, and Maître Philippe lost no time in beginning. To-day, Madame remained in the room, flung in a cat-like, comfort-seeking pose among the cushions on the divan. Jeannot sang, and as he sang he must perforce catch her eyes now and then. Madame's eyes were worth remembering,—the quick, strange way in which they dilated and narrowed had a peculiar fascination which was difficult to analyze. When the lesson was over, she stirred for the first time, and sat upright.

"Now, brother Philippe," she said, "you have filled his head full of scales and trills and shakes. Come here beside me, Jeannot, and I will try to make you forget them all!" She laughed softly as she spoke, and, as Jeannot came toward her, the Master left the room, his confidence in his sister's intelligence warring with a certain distrust of her present methods.

Madame had never talked with Jeannot before for any length of time. She found him quick,—almost witty, indeed,—and most appreciative. But he laughed at everything,

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at life, at love, at death, and at the hereafter. There was something uncanny in the sound of that careless, short laugh of his, coming from so young a mouth. A handsome, lovable mouth it was,—this Madame noticed. She also perceived the tone of curious blue-purple which made his eyes so attractive and unusual.

“*Tiens*,” she said at last, looking full at him,—her voice was as vibrant and as sweet as a note of music. “You are a very dear boy. So away, now. I have some letters to write before *déjeuner*.”

She did not offer him her hand, but laid it lightly on his arm for a moment. Then, after he had gone, she sat, wrapped in dreams, for quite twenty minutes, and was only awakened from this most seductive reverie by the rather shrill sound of Liselle’s voice.

“Truly, *ma tante*,” she was asserting in a high key, “this is a most evil and dreadful land. I desire greatly to return to the dear sisters and learn more crochet-strokes.”

“Do not talk so loud,” said Madame, sharply. “Your voice deafens me. No, child, forgive me. I spoke without thought. Are you indeed so wretched away from your

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convent? But come upstairs with me, and we will talk together."

Summer,—hot, sweet, full of suggestive sounds and scents,—drifted by. Hardly a month had passed before Madame woke to the knowledge that her experiment in souls had carried her into deeper water than she had dreamed probable. She discovered, by slow processes rather than through any flash of revelation, that she loved Jeannot, intensely—as she could love. And she dreamed, imagined, even believed, that a certain maturity had come to the boy's mind of late. He spoke more gently, more seriously now, and laughed less mockingly. He sang little, save at his lessons, and these did not go well. He would not practice his exercises, the Master complained.

The sultry weather had irritated the nerves of all of them before August had gone by. Even Liselle was aroused from her stilted phrases and methodical ways, and was more than once found by her aunt in a passion of tears. It was a strange summer.

Still Madame clung passionately to her "experiment"—so much more than an experiment now. A soul of much strength,

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fire and scope had been given to Françoise Perrinat when she was born—a life of struggle and toil had developed it,—a passionate love affair and early widowhood had given it knowledge and poise. And it was this soul which she was tearing into atoms to serve Jeannot de Bonfoi, and to win his love.

Not for one moment did she doubt the certainty of her success. It was quite impossible, clearly, that such whole-hearted love as hers should be without return, without completion or crown. Sometimes it angered her to realize that she had given her heart to a foolish, careless boy, but, after all, she argued to her wise self, there is no fitness nor unfitness in love's eyes. These things are regulated by strange and unseen laws,—and Madame knew that no accumulated proof that Jeannot was the last person on earth whom she should love would affect her. As for the matter of age, she could afford to laugh at that when she looked in the glass and saw her dark, brilliant face,—always beautiful—now young again through love.

One hot night full of electric-seeming silences, Madame stood with Jeannot on the verandah. The honey-suckle, climbing all

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about them, shook in a short-lived wind. The scent blew in their faces and quickened their breath. Honey-suckle perfume seemed to pervade the universe.

"Ah, it is beautiful,—the night," sighed Madame, speaking tremulously because she feared the stillness. "And to-morrow I go far from here—to visit a friend. You will miss me, Jeannot?"

"You are going away?" he said, as though startled. "I did not know."

"No, I would not tell you. It is Madeleine Calmont—*la pauvre*—she needs me, having lost her child. You will miss me, Jeannot?"

The repetition of the words disturbed him. He frowned in the darkness, yet, hesitatingly, he put out his hand and touched her arm. It was bare and warm, and it seemed to thrill under his fingers.

Suddenly, Madame turned and, half distraught with the sweetness of the night and the sadness of the parting, put her hands upon his shoulders and leaned against him. Instinctively his arms closed about her and they stood so for a heart-beat. Then Madame drew his face to hers and swiftly kissed him.

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After which she vanished within and did not see him again before she left.

She was gone a month, but she was not unhappy, for she had many things upon which to dream, and she now felt certain that Jeannot was growing to love her, and that he was finding his soul. It would have amazed Maître Philippe had he been able to know precisely the working of his sister's mind at just that period.

It was the end of September when Madame came home. All the way her heart was singing. All the way she was saying to herself,—“He will have learned, through my absence, his own heart.” So often had she dreamed of the moment when she would enter the hall and pause at the door of the music-room that the actual occurrence of these things seemed like the repetition of familiar events. It also seemed eminently in keeping that she should hear Jeannot's beautiful voice, singing, as she crossed the threshold of the house. It was all quite natural and proper, only . . . As she stood there listening to the music, she suddenly raised her hands to her heart and lifted her face with a jerk, transfixed by a dawning

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knowledge. Never before had Jeannot sung like that. Madame did not feel her gloves and handkerchief drop from her hands, did not know that the tears were running down her cheeks. Jeannot was singing, "*Ah, Lève-toi, Soliel*," by Gounod, and he was singing it with a passion and a power at which to marvel.

"*Ah, Dieu!*!" whispered Madame, with shut eyes and quivering lips, "he has found the soul,—I hear it!—*Ah, Dieu de bonté, Dieu de sagesse!* I hear it."

Very slowly she walked toward the door of the music-room, the joy in her heart too solemn to admit of haste. She would wait for the last "*Lève-toi!*!" And then she would push aside the curtain and enter, and crown him with her love and adoration forever. Ah, she had never dreamed,—never, never, that even love could teach him to sing like that!

The final high, sweet note died away and was lost in the accompaniment which swiftly ceased in a sustained chord. Madame flung the curtain aside, and entered with a noiseless step. So noiseless was it that it was not heard, and, as an animal retreats from a

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hunter, Madame stepped back, and back, until she stood once more outside the room. Her hand still held the curtain so that she might see. This new thing was so terrible that there would have to be much seeing before she could believe.

For Jeannot sat on the piano-stool looking up with eyes of love at the face of the girl who bent over him,—a girl about whom his arm was clasped, a girl whose small, pale face was alight with tenderness—Liselle. There is an old tradition that youth calls to youth. This flashed into Madame's dizzy brain as for one burning, horrible moment she looked. Liselle bent lower and they kissed each other, but neither spoke. The sunshine lay like a golden carpet upon the floor. The room was glorified, magnificent.

Madame dropped the curtain.

A QUESTION OF MOTIVE

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A Question of Motive



HE violinist, spasmodically exploited by fashionable "leaders" in London, and now the ostensible drawing-card at Lady Griggs's evening reception, had just come back to earth in a triumphant staccato finale. The last notes of the accompaniment were becoming merged in the ascending tumult of polite conversation;—one of the trying but necessary interludes being past, people were hastily enjoying themselves, chattering volubly and, in a measure, against time, always with the imminent danger of another solo from the celebrity. At an evening musical, one may watch human nature with extraordinary ease. Whether a certain safety is felt under cover of what should be a general concentration of attention, or whether some unconscious effect of the music brings inherent

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emotions to the surface, I know not. But if you look about you during a musical number, you may constantly behold a very strange disarray of masks, and may be startled by the sight of utterly unprecedented passions painted upon familiar faces.

A tall man with a curiously attractive smile and satirical eyes, stood in a doorway; and, being something of a philosopher, with a taste for analysis, he cast his eyes occasionally over the mixed roomful of people and drew some interesting conclusions from very commonplace external evidence. And as he looked,—with an ironic inward laugh,—his vagrant glance encountered the carelessly poised blonde head of a girl on the other side of the room. He knew her,—had met her often during his two years of diplomatic life. They were sworn enemies, yet she attracted him to-night for the first time. Perhaps he recognized a certain sympathetic irony in the curl of her lips, and the quiet, meditative look in her gray eyes. At all events, he crossed the room with the deliberation of a man who always claims what he chooses, and leaned against the wall at her side.

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“How do you do?” he said, looking down. “I do not think I have seen you about lately.”

Alison Campbell looked up at him with a slightly mocking expression.

“Some people ‘have eyes and see not,’ ” she quoted, lightly. “I should doubt your attentive search, Count Ralné. I have gone out as much as usual—certainly more than I like.”

“Ah, you find it—wearing—too! I knew, somehow, that we agreed on that. Why have we not agreed on other things, I wonder.”

“I suppose the point of view of a distinguished diplomat and an eccentric American girl could hardly be expected to be identical.”

“They tell me you dislike diplomats. Is that true?—All diplomats? You must not take me as a type of my companions in crime. Some of them are quite nice.”

“I like the men of my own country best. Does that offend you?”

“No, it is delightful. You do not flatter. Pardon me if I say that many of your country-women, as well as many ladies of

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this delightful but foggy land, are prone to flattery. They put a man a little too much at his ease with their—flattery.”

“I suppose,” said the girl, indifferently, “that they instinctively take the tone which they think will be most satisfactory. We are very adaptable, you know, with all—” She stopped herself before she said “classes of people.”

Her companion’s eyes sparkled.

“*Mais comme vous êtes délicieuse!*” he murmured, but she pretended not to hear.

“For example,” he said, slightly changing his tactics, “the little lady opposite.”

His eyes indicated a slight, brown-eyed girl with a laughing glance and an appealing mouth.

“Bessie Lucas,” said Miss Campbell, quickly, “my best friend,—yes, and what of her?”

“Your best friend? Ah, well, I must say no more then. You are a loyal friend, are you not?”

“What about Bessie?” she asked, insistently.

“Only it is such as she of whom I spoke just now;—who give us so much kind—flat-

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terry. I like that word, by the way; it is courteous and non-committal, and it is so like charity, which covers, etc.!"

She looked at him a moment, then she said very low, "Count Ranlé, that is what I meant when I said that I liked my own countrymen best. An American would not have said that."

"If you have a fault," he remarked, suavely, "it is that of jumping to quick conclusions. I said nothing in any way uncomplimentary to your friend,—far from it. Indeed, I adore her—as you may possibly have heard. One always does hear things, I find, in time."

"No," said Alison, quietly, "I have never heard that. I have heard that you have devoted yourself to her, that you have followed her about, have even boasted of your easy conquest,—but no more."

"She is charming," he declared, diplomatically. "Come,—I can say no more than that."

"No," Alison said, rather bitterly. "Of course you can say no more than that,—you who have tried to spoil her pretty, child-like illusions of people and things, and, with

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other men, have talked about her naïvete,—of course, you can say no more.”

He opened his eyes a little wider.

“ You are not in earnest, surely ? ” he exclaimed, more seriously. “ You are only jesting, of course ! ” She said nothing, and he understood that she had been thoroughly in earnest.

“ Really,” he said, after a short pause, “ it had never occurred to me that I was a modern Faust.”

Still she said nothing and he laughed a little.

“ Ah,” he besought, in a peculiarly pleasant voice, and with a frank gaze, “ do not be so hard on a little affaire; why, everyone has flirtations nowadays. They do no one a grain of harm,—there is thorough good feeling all through and afterward. What hurt can a few pretty speeches and half a dozen boxes of roses do Miss Lucas? Or even—” he hesitated—“ say the little affaire went a bit farther,—she will only be the more lessoned in the art which is more important than anything else in life,—the art of love ! ”

“ I suppose,” returned Alison, slowly, “ that you will think me gauche,—stupid,—

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bourgeois, in speaking to you like this. I am not sure I am not all three. But I love Bessie dearly, and I mean to save her from you yet. I'm telling you of my intention, you see, for I always fight fair."

"I believe that," he said, with an inflection which was a compliment.

"Remember," she said, looking straight at him, "if I did not think more of her welfare than of dignity and good taste and even good breeding, I should order you out of my sight. And, Count Ranlé, you should always remain out of it, even though we met face to face."

He felt distinctly uncomfortable, for he could not understand the look in her eyes.

"I suppose," she went on, with apparently a vituperative pleasure in each fresh sting which she invented, "this interview would make a good chapter in your story of the little affaire at the club."

"Miss Campbell!" he said, flushing. And she had a curious desire to apologize; only she would not. She tapped her left hand with her fan and kept her eyes in her lap.

"Count Ranlé, you are a man whose reputation is not of the kind to permit you to be attentive to any young girl."

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“Truly you are frank.”

“I am trying to be dispassionate and just. Your name was coupled with those of several women in Washington a few years ago—not to their advantage.”

“Pardon me,” he interrupted, dryly, “but a woman’s name is never coupled with a man’s,—in that sense,—to her advantage, Miss Campbell.”

“That is true, but against a certain girl whose name came up for discussion as to her eligibility for a girl’s theatre club for Lent, and who was not admitted, there was no better charge brought than that last year Count Ranlé used to be devoted to her. A certain hostess whom I know was called to account by a débutante’s mother, because she had allowed the girl to sit next to Count Ranlé at dinner. Shall I give you other instances to support my ideas?”

“Thank you,” he answered, stiffly, “you have been peculiarly happy in your choice of the first two. I will not ask for any others.”

“It is all a matter of public opinion,” the girl went on, steadily. “You see, however innocent and worthy you may know yourself to be, you are not considered, in the

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world's eyes, a proper person to send Miss Lucas 'half a dozen boxes of roses,' nor to carry on a little affaire with her. Yet you have, I suppose, succeeded up to a point,—you have certainly taught her to lie in order to meet you, to . . . But it is all too revolting, too hateful. I cannot talk about it any more. Only I could not contain myself. I—I wish that music would stop. It is deafening, confusing." She leaned back and fanned herself rapidly. Her face was very white.

Ranlé looked down at her with growing admiration. It was with a certain quiet determination that he bent over her and said: "You are a loyal friend, but you cannot keep people from following their bent. Has Miss Lucas told you her plans for tomorrow?"

"Yes—she lunches with Alice Miller, a mutual friend of ours."

"Ah, yes—she told you that? Truly, the diplomatic corps lost a man in her! That was not a case of the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, Miss Campbell. I myself had hoped to see your friend at luncheon by some fortunate chance. Yet I do not know Miss Miller."

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She turned slowly, read his eyes, and saw that he spoke truth.

"I will stop it," she said, hotly. "I will make her see,—I will tell her what you are."

"And would she believe you? She thinks I am a lover such as rode in tourneys for his lady in the Middle Ages. She would not take even your word against mine."

"No,—it is true," she said, very low. "I know it. She is weak, blinded,—and you have done it all. What a thing to be proud of, Count Ranlé!"

He saw how beautiful was the line of her cheek and throat. A bunch of violets pinned in her gown made the fair curves of her neck like marble. Her hair, as he bent over her, was a soft, dense mass of gold.

"She is weak and blinded," he answered her, speaking under his breath, "a child, a flower, a butterfly. She cannot think, feel, love, understand, suffer. She has been,—she only could be,—a plaything at best,—a thing to delight in for a moment and then brush aside as one would brush a roseleaf. Can you imagine that such a woman could ever hold more than a passing charm for a man of my nature? I could only love some

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one as strong and as indomitable as myself,—some one as passionate,—as fervent in hate and in love,—the complement yet the fulfillment of myself. Ah, I could make such a woman understand the inner meanings of herself as she had never even dreamed she should understand. I could——”

He broke off, but the intensity of his look forced her to turn her head upward and meet his eyes. She shivered a little as she did so, but she did not glance away.

“We have been enemies for so long!” he went on. “But enemies are better than mere casual acquaintances, indifferent to each other. To-night I came across to you because I felt that we belonged together, you and I, in this crowd of alien people.”

“And Bessie?” she said, slowly, still looking up at him. “And the luncheon to-morrow?”

His eyes blazed suddenly, and she read in them a warm if short-lived passion.

“Let me come to see you,” he said, “let me come,—and tell you—oh, the numbers of things that I should like to tell you—and I will forget the luncheon—and everything else.”

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She rose and closed her fan slowly. There was a strange light in her eyes at the moment, he noticed.

"I am going now," she said, formally. "Is not that Lady Griggs standing with her back to us? I must say good-night."

"May I put you into your carriage?" he asked, and accepting a certain faint motion of her head as consent, he bowed conventionally and moved away.

When she went down the steps a few minutes later, she found him at her side. When she entered her carriage his hand on hers gave her caressing rather than perfunctory assistance. And as she drew the door toward her, he caught it and seemed about to speak.

"No," she said, faintly. "No, really, I must go. And about to-morrow,—if you will come at—"

"Yes?" he said, softly, "at—"

There was a brief silence, then suddenly she dragged the door toward her till it clicked, and cried out, almost with a sob in the words: "No—no—no! You must not come! I have changed my mind. I have no right to interfere in your affairs nor in

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Bessie's. Forget what I have said, or at least forgive it, if you can. As you have said—everyone—everyone—must follow their own bent—they— Oh, tell him to drive on, please,—quickly, quickly,—good-night."

The carriage was moving, for the man had heard the order, but the look in her eyes made Ranlé stretch out his hands toward her and cry in amazement, " Alison ! " Then she was gone, and there was only the click-clack of the horses' hoofs going off toward Prince's Gate.

" Good God ! " he muttered, " I believe if that damned coachman hadn't driven off so quickly——"

" Beg pardon, sir ? " said the man in livery on the steps.

" I did not speak." And he walked down the street in the direction of his Embassy.

And, meanwhile, Alison Campbell was sobbing her heart out in the darkness of the carriage.

" I should never have known," she whispered, " I could never have told whether or not my motive was true. If I had gone on and perhaps separated them,—it might have been for Bessie's sake, but it might—it

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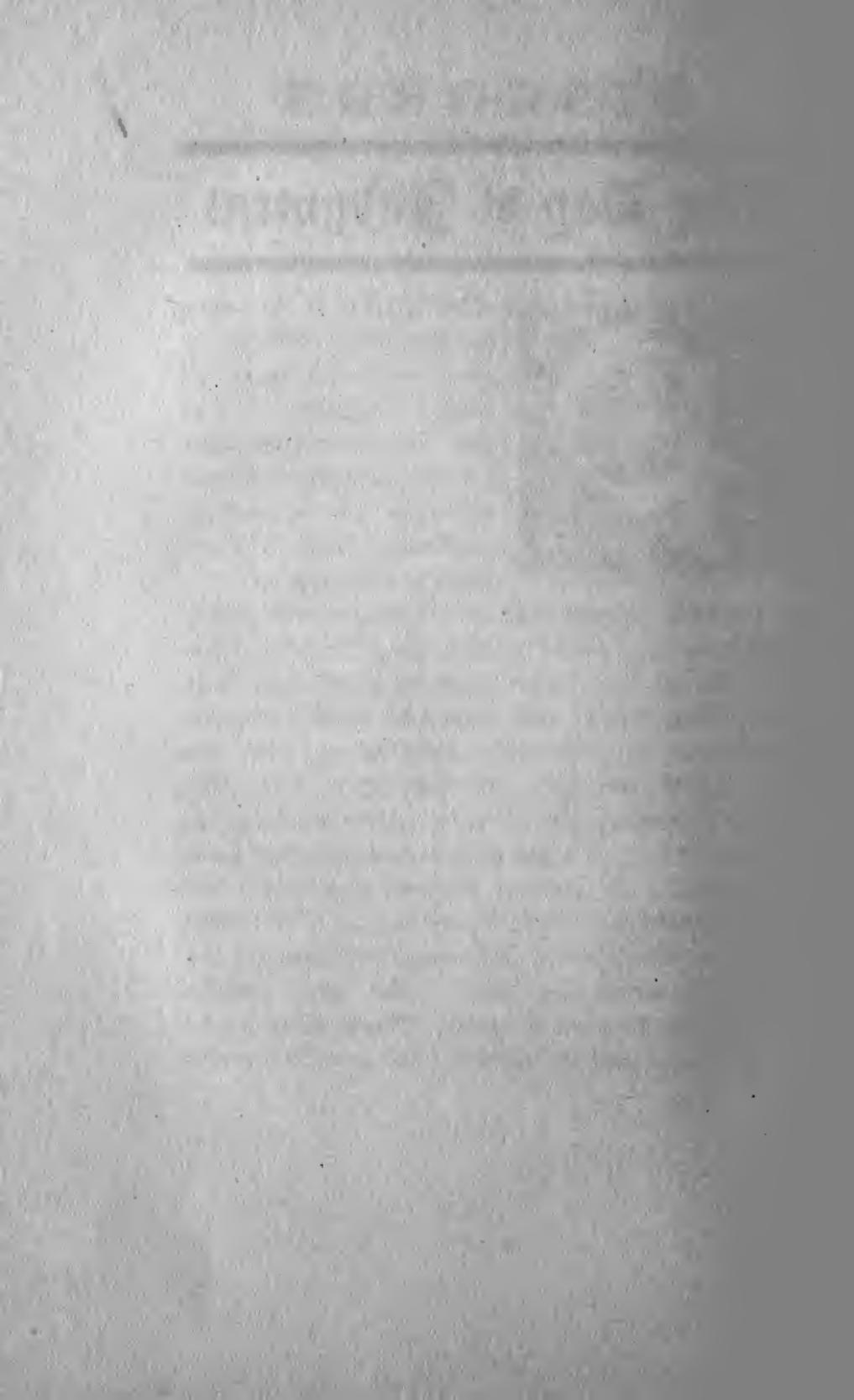
might—it *would* have been for my own. Dear Lord in Heaven, why have you let me love him as I do? Love him,—love him,—love him,—so that nothing,—not the things I hear of him, not the things I know of him, not the things I say of him,—can take away the love."

But in the morning arrived some heavy-scented violets and a card: "I am coming at twelve o'clock—to help you save your friend. Remember, you are being purely philanthropic; but—I am coming. Will you wear these, or return them, I wonder?—Ranlé."

She grew very white, but with a hesitating hand she thrust the violets into the bosom of her gown.

It was just noon.

T H E D A Y O F
J U D G M E N T



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The Day of Judgment



ENFOLD is a very small, sober village in the northern part of New England. It is the most respectable village in America, according to statistics, and they have a Free Public Library.

Upon a certain day in a certain year, Penfold was interested in learning that the Bastick Farm had been sold to a strange lady from New York. She was a Miss Mary Rush, a spinster of seemingly definite age, and she had a full sufficiency of worldly goods. She was, however, absolutely unpretentious, as it turned out, in spite of her comfortable bank account, and seemed almost shy when her neighbours made kindly advances. With her was her small niece, her dead brother's child, she explained,—a pale little girl, twelve years old, named Phyllis. They were a curious pair,—the quiet woman who, by virtue

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of her staid bearing, seemed much older than her actual thirty-nine, and the fragile, pretty child who already partook slightly of her aunt's shy gravity and reticence.

Penfold never grew to know Miss Rush very well. She was courteous to every one, and seemed grateful for kindness and friendliness ; but she permitted no intimacy, and after a while Penfold settled itself to a simple acceptance of Miss Rush as she was,—stand-offishness and all.

Ten years slipped softly and gravely by in the Bastick Farm. The crimson rambler had climbed higher up the old walls ; the garden was fuller and sweeter ; the wood-shed had needed repairing more than once. Mary Rush's hair had begun to turn gray, and she had grown a little colder and more reserved. And Phyllis had become a tall, slight girl with yellow hair and colourless complexion—a beauty, people said, marking her delicacy and her strange air of distinction. More than one Penfold youth adored her from afar, but in vain. Miss Rush disliked all men, and Phyllis herself seemed, for a young and beautiful girl, strangely indifferent to the opposite sex.

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The two women lived in a world of books and flowers and unexciting household affairs. They were quite content with long mornings spent in consorting with Goldsmith and Bacon, and afternoons in caring for poppies and larkspur. Their sympathy seemed profound if undemonstrative, and neither would have admitted that she was not perfectly happy.

And the Day of Judgment began to creep up below the horizon, gathering itself for that "Awful Rose of Dawn" at the last.

It was in autumn, warm-hued and tragic, that the shadows seemed to deepen as they sometimes do preparatory to the coming morning. Aunt and niece sat in the library having tea. That pretty feast seems fated, in paradox of its innocent festivity of intention, to accompany very many unnamed tragedies.

"Aunt Mary," said Phyllis, quietly, "when I was walking to-day I met Dr. Caine."

"Did you?" was her aunt's sole response.

"He—he walked with me to the village and back. He was rather disagreeable."

"Matthew Caine is a good man," said Miss Rush, pouring hot water slowly into her cup. "What did he say?"

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“He asked me to marry him. He even had the impertinence to persist after I had refused him. I thought it exceedingly vulgar of him.”

“Why did you refuse him?”

“Why?” Phyllis opened her clear, gray eyes very wide. “Aunt Mary! How can you ask? I detest him.”

“I should like you to marry him.”

“He said you ‘favoured his suit.’ Those were his detestable words. I did not believe him at the time. I didn’t know you even liked him. I didn’t know you wanted me to marry any one. Aunt Mary, will you really tell me why you wish me to marry that man?”

“I think, as I said, that he is a good man, who will make you a safe husband.”

“Please tell me what you mean by ‘safe.’ I never did understand that expression. Does it mean that he would be safe or I?”

“Both,—principally you. It is a very good thing for a woman to be quite secure, quite well cared for and protected.”

“Why should I need protection?”

“All women need it; you more than most. You inherit many weak and wayward ten-

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dencies. Your father was a dissipated man. The less said of your mother the better."

Phyllis flushed.

"I don't like to hear you speak so of my mother," she said gently. "I know you never approved of my father's marriage, but—she was my mother, and she is dead."

Mary Rush laughed with peculiar and unwonted harshness.

"That is true," she said, "she is dead. I repeat,—I wish you to marry Dr. Caine, Phyllis. I told him I would use my influence."

"I cannot marry him, Aunt Mary," said Phyllis, definitely.

"It is very evident that I overestimated my influence when I offered to use it," remarked Miss Rush, drily and rather cruelly. But neither said any more, though Phyllis was deeply hurt and puzzled.

It was her aunt who broached the subject a week later.

"I have told Dr. Caine that you will marry him," she said. They were in the garden, at the time, covering sensitive bulbs with straw and preparing for the approaching winter. Phyllis stopped her work to look at her.

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"I am sorry you did that," she said, quietly and steadily, "because I shall not."

Mary Rush controlled the sudden passion which leaped to her eyes and flushed her face.

"You will forfeit my affection for the rest of your life," she said, her voice shaking a trifle. "I will never forget your lack of obedience, your lack of gratitude, your lack of docility, of womanliness—" she stopped, breathless, then went on grimly, "and I shall never forgive you."

Phyllis grew very pale.

"Aunt Mary!" she said; "is it that you don't love me any longer? You can't, of course,—to speak to me like that!"

Mary Rush's lips quivered, but she made no response.

"The worst of it is," pursued the girl, brokenly, "I have no one else to talk to,—no one else at all. And so it has come to this, that I must tell you the truth, in spite of your hardness and unkindness toward me. Not only do I not love him, Aunt Mary, but I love someone else—very much."

Miss Rush looked petrified.

"Who?" she asked, briefly.

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"You will be angry if I tell you," whispered Phyllis, with drooping head. "It is someone whom I can love, but—never can marry. There is a—barrier—between us. But we can look across the barrier and love each other. Only that."

Miss Rush still stared at her.

"Who is it?" she asked again.

"He—has duties in his life," Phyllis continued, growing very pale. "We can never be anything to each other. But I—I can keep myself free and faithful and true for his sake. That at least I can do."

"Duties!" broke in Miss Rush. "And I suppose you have no duties! Tell me the name of this man who has let you love him, though he cannot marry you."

"Hush!" said Phyllis, quickly. "You vulgarize it by speaking like that. We are not that kind of people, Aunt Mary. His love asks to come no nearer to me than mine to come to him. We ask—nothing. It is—Wilson Stone, Aunt Mary."

"Wilson Stone!" repeated Miss Rush. "Let me be sure I know who you mean. He is the man who lives at the other end of Penfold—the man with the invalid wife?"

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Phyllis bowed her head.

"He is a trusted lawyer, is he not?" went on Miss Rush, relentlessly.

"Yes."

"A gentleman?"

"Yes."

"And an honourable man, evidently. A person with scruples and high ideals!" She went to Phyllis and caught hold of her arms, her eyes full of fire. The girl should have seen the passion of love behind their anger, but she only shrank a little, fearing her aunt for the first time.

"Now," said Mary Rush, panting, "you must marry Matthew Caine. This settles it; nothing else can save you. I know these pure passions; good God! do I not? I have seen many such in my life. And I tell you to marry Dr. Caine, and to thank God that such a way of safety and escape lies open to you."

She pushed the girl from her and went into the house.

The next day she announced to every one in the village that Phyllis was engaged to Dr. Caine, and that they were to be married before Christmas.

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During the following month Bastick Farm was like a tomb where two unfriendly ghosts lived, moved, ate and slept, but never spoke. Phyllis had once for all said that she would never marry Dr. Caine. Mary Rush had said that she should if she had to drag her to the church herself. So matters rested.

Then, one night, Phyllis spoke to her aunt for the first time in four weeks.

"Aunt Mary," she said, "I am going away."

Mary Rush looked suddenly twice her real age. She clasped either arm of her chair with rigid fingers and sat staring.

"I am going away," repeated Phyllis. "I cannot bear it any longer. I have nothing to hold fast to. You are trying to drive me into this marriage. You know I would rather die and go to hell. You don't love me any more. I am going away."

"Where do you intend to go?" asked Miss Rush, speaking with difficulty, but in an icy voice.

"I—don't know." Phyllis's voice was vague and miserable. "I believe I shall go to New York and try to get some sort of a

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position. I think I could teach. I don't know,—oh, I don't know! It kills me to go away,—alone,—I am afraid. But there is nothing else to do. I cannot bear this,—I cannot,—truly I cannot. And while Wilson Stone is alive I will marry no other man."

Mary Rush bent her head on her hands and began to rock herself to and fro, moaning. The dawn of the Day of Judgment was beginning to stain her sky with red.

"Oh, my God! Oh, my God!" she muttered; Phyllis heard the low words,—"it would have been so much better if Thou hadst never let her be born!"

Phyllis, shocked and frightened, slipped from the room.

Mary Rush sat for an hour, a swaying, shivering figure in her armchair. And the fire went out, and the night-wind which in late autumn heralds and imitates mid-winter, howled around the house. Finally, she rose and with unsteady steps went to her desk; then she began to write. Her face was very white, but it was strangely determined. The time had come for the truth, at last. She wrote as though her

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hand were impelled by fate, and as she wrote her pen grew fluent and her thoughts eloquent. Her restraint of years was being washed away in this great flood of confession and explanation :

“ My Phyllis :—

“ If I have hurt you and broken your heart, as I believe I may have with my cruelty and hardness, it is only your right that you should know why I have seemed to turn from you in this hour of your pain and struggle. Ah, my dear, it has not been because I have not understood, but because I have understood too well. And, seeing the rocks ahead, I have tried with all my might to drive you away from them into a safe channel. In doing this I have hurt you, and I have done no good. So now I will speak, and you shall judge for yourself in these questions with which I have wrestled alone and in my own heart for twenty-three years.

“ You have a very credulous nature, Phyllis : one which is satisfied with very few explanations. Your curiosity is almost null. This must be the reason why you have never insisted upon knowing more than the

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barest facts concerning your parentage. I told you long ago that your father was my brother, that he married some one whom I disliked, and that they both died when you were two years old. It was a very pretty tale, and I had learned it carefully. I had also prepared various links in the chain, and some confirmatory evidence, in case the man you married should prove more curious than you.

“The whole story was false,—from first to last, and in every smallest particular, absolutely and utterly untrue. My one excuse for framing it is that it was for your sake. A cloud hangs very blackly over your birth, my dear, and I would not let it shadow your life if I could prevent it merely by taking a few lies upon my conscience. It can bear much, that conscience of mine,—it has never been very dainty.

“My child, your mother was a woman much as you are, with just such power for passion and for suffering, and just such determination and indomitable loyalty. She was allowed to run as she would, and no one guided or guarded her. She fell in love with a man much older than herself, an

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honourable man in his daily habit of life, but one who in this case loved neither wisely nor well. He induced her to leave her home and go away with him. He had a wife, and later he read in the papers that she had become unbalanced mentally and was in an institution for insanity. He never got over it. They, your father and your mother, were not happy together; love is very rarely worth the price we are willing and eager to pay for it. Can you see now why I have feared for you, seeing how pitilessly history was repeating itself in the conditions preparatory to the cataclysm?

“Phyllis,—you are not my niece, you are my daughter. Your father left me in New York the year you were born. He is dead, now. I would rather not tell you his name. You have never heard it, and it would mean nothing to you, but it would kill me to see it written here, in my own hand. There are the facts of your birth, at last,—naked, shameful and brutally unvarnished. You now have the truth, and when you have read it, I think you will perhaps begin to understand me a little. Every hour of my life, minute by minute, I have tried to ex-

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piate my sin against you. I do not care in the least for my crime against social conditions or against the church, against man or against God. May He forgive me for saying it! But my suffering lies in this: that, through my wrong, you were born onto the earth nameless,—a creature with no place in the world, with a stigma attached to you. I have done my best to eradicate the stigma and the shame for you. I have lied and schemed and lost my own soul that yours might be safely sheltered. I have guarded you, I have brought you up in honour and comfort and peace, respected by every one, suspected by no one. This is true, is it not, Phyllis? And I have said to myself, 'She will marry a good man, and little children will grow up about her, and she will be safe from the world and its sin.'

"I am your mother, Phyllis, and with that right I speak to you. Learn through me, my dear. Put this love out of your life. You can do it, though it will hurt. Marry the man who honours you and will make you his wife in all men's eyes. It is your one hope for a respected, tranquil life. I wish it; I command it.

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“ Though I love you more than my hope of salvation, Phyllis, I do not ask you to love me in return. I only ask you to pause and to consider and to—obey. I know—I know—I know.

“ Your mother.

“ Mary Rush.”

She placed the letter in an envelope and went slowly upstairs. A lamp still burned in Phyllis's room. She paused outside the door and said in a shaking voice :

“ Phyllis,—I have left something—here,—on the hall table—for you to read. I will see you in the morning.”

Then she went away to her own room and sank upon the bed, dressed as she was, too weary to move a finger, too weary to cry, and far, far too weary to sleep.

The night wore away, and morning came, and with it the sounds that proclaim the commencement of the every-day household machinery. Voices in the kitchen region exchanged salutations. Milk poured from can to can. Wire doors slammed, and the sound of the coffee-grinder mingled with a cheerful Irish voice humming below. Mary Rush lay stiff and wide-eyed on the bed,

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wondering how it was that things could go on,—and on,—and on,—while mental tragedies were violently enacted, and life after life reached its crisis and was settled for good or ill.

She rose with grim determination at her regular hour, and went down to breakfast. Phyllis was not yet in the room. She seated herself at the table and began to pour out a cup of coffee with a steady hand. Then, suddenly, she saw an envelope lying on her plate. It was addressed in Phyllis's hand, it was duly stamped, and it was postmarked Pen-fold.

"That was the only letter, ma'am, that the man brought," said the maid.

Miss Rush read the superscription several times before she had the courage to open it. She had spilled some hot coffee on her hand, but felt no burn. The maid went to one of the windows and fastened back a blind which was banging in the wind. How fresh and crisp the air was—how golden-yellow the sun! A dry vine rattled in the sudden gusts, and out on the road the clouds of dust were brightened to silver.

At last she opened the letter.

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“Penfold Station.

“11.30 p. m.

“Dear Aunt Mary:—

“When I left you an hour ago I went out into the dark. I did not know where I was going,—I only knew that I must go. I was very unhappy and absolutely at sea. There was nowhere to go, and no one to turn to—except Wilson. He found me. I think I should have killed myself if he had not, but he did,—and then everything was made right. And we have given up everything, he and I, and are going away together to some city where we will be quite lost in the rush of people. I know we are very wicked, but what can we do? What can we do? If you had only seemed to love me a little, but I have felt lately that I was only a burden which you hated, and I could not do as you wished; I could not marry Dr. Caine. Please try to forget me and the disgrace I have brought to you. I suppose even shame may be forgotten in time. Forgive me—forgive me! But I was so unhappy,—and I love him so!

“Phyllis Rush.”

Mary Rush went upstairs with a steady step and entered the deserted room. The

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lamp had burned out and the air was close and murky. She looked about her without a change of expression; then came out and shut the door. Then she picked up her unread confession from the table, and tore it into tiny pieces, and let each white scrap blow away out of the hall window.

“ ‘I suppose even shame may be forgotten in time,’ ” she quoted, with that calm which is born after the final blow has been dealt, and the last test given emotional strength. “Forgotten! Forgotten! If I were a weak woman I should take refuge in the great Forgetfulness!” She closed her eyes for a second, luxuriating in the thought. “But I have never been a weak woman,—never a coward, whatever else I may have been. My reckoning has come, and I will cheat neither God nor the Devil. It is hell-fire henceforth,—which is quite as it should be. After the Day of Judgment there comes no oblivion through the rest of time and eternity.”

S H A D O W S

DISCORDS

Shadows



ORDON was watching the clock with strange impatience. The motion of those hesitating hands lessened momentarily the distance between him and one of the great tragedies of his life. Yet he hun-

gered for the silver chime of eight which should tell him that his hour was at hand.

For years he had chosen the better part—or so he called it—of inaction in the world's busy doings. He had read and studied; he valued most things justly, appreciated his own powers and limitations accurately, and made use of them wisely. Had the analytical observer been asked to cite for demonstration a mind perfectly balanced and excellently adjusted, he could hardly have failed to at least remember that of Francis Gordon.

This judicial poise and clarity of thought

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were somewhat remarkable when one considered that he had suffered from a great and embittering injustice twenty years before,—an injustice which had seriously affected his reputation, and might well have poisoned his entire mind and nature. A man had defrauded him of his good name for honour and gentlemanliness, and that is a theft for which there are few legal or public means of satisfaction. The man who had so wronged him was named Louis Ellis, and he had married the girl Gordon loved. They had been friends as boys and young men, and Gordon had remained loyal to his chum, steadfastly putting his own disappointment aside. But Ellis had always been jealous of his more brilliant friend, and had treated him with a certain disguised hostility which was characteristic of the man. One night in Ellis's own house, the host had accused his guest of cheating at cards.

Others at the table supported the assertion, and Gordon found himself in a moment the chief figure in a rather unpleasant scandal. The matter was ostensibly "hushed up," but, like all such affairs, was soon known to every man and woman in New York, and, in

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spite of the large majority of people who still believed in him, Frank Gordon was henceforward a marked man. He chose not to put his friends' confidence to the test, and saying carelessly that "he could afford to ignore such matters," he had dropped more and more out of the world, and devoted himself exclusively to his books and a dilettante form of journalism which amused him.

It was long since he had asked anyone to dinner in his rooms; it was twenty years since he had spoken to Louis Ellis. Now, in the words of his man, he was "entertaining again," and his guest was Ellis,—his worst enemy,—the man whose hand he had sworn never to touch again. He had written him a brief note asking him to put bygones by and dine with him, and Ellis had accepted with the nervous effusiveness of one who feels himself in the wrong.

The clock struck eight.

Gordon heard a hansom stop at the door downstairs. He rose and walked slowly up and down the room once. As he passed the long mirror he noticed his spare well-dressed figure as though it were another man's. He did not see the tense whiteness of his lips,

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nor the curious look in his eyes which would have interested an alienist.

“Mr. Ellis, sir.”

Gordon held out his hand, with a sense that another man was responsible for the action. Ellis was a heavy man, with a sallow skin and pale eyes. A short, stiff mustache covered his upper lip, and his lower was weak and full. Gordon was no taller but, by virtue of his slightness and his nice proportion, gave the impression of several inches advantage.

“Awfully good in you,” Ellis stammered, plunging fatally into the one impossible tone and manner.

Gordon’s face did not harden, only because it was already adamantine. He merely bowed and answered, “It’s a good while since we’ve met, isn’t it? That’s the best chair, I think. Will you have anything to drink before dinner?”

Dinner was immediately announced. The two men sat alone at a large and elaborately appointed table, and talked commonplaces over the expanse of candle-lit white and silver. Gordon was courtesy itself, and the wine was insidious, yet Ellis was ill at ease.

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Truth to tell he could not imagine why Gordon had asked him to dinner. He had come from a certain curious sense of cowardice. He feared his enemy and weakly wished to propitiate him by acquiescence. Now, as he sat opposite him, he felt profoundly sorry that he had come. A hideous constraint was upon him, and the past like a skull and cross-bones seemed to grin and rattle between them.

The room was full of shadows, and the wavering candle flames made them dance upon the walls and take strange shapes. They sat on and on, and in spite of the rare cigar and the marvellous liqueurs Ellis still cringed and paled with a sense of unrest and fear. Finally he rose, with an unsteady remark as to the lateness of the hour.

"It would be a pity to go, though, before the storm lifts," protested Gordon. "Such a downpour cannot last long."

Ellis became conscious for the first time of the roar of wind and rain outside. Strange to say, he had not noticed it—until Gordon spoke; but, now that he heard, it seemed to shut out past and future.

"Still, I must go," he said, nervously.

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Gordon's eyes had narrowed slightly, the smoke curling over his head took fantastic shapes. The butler had left the room some time since. Was it the wine, or the thunder of the storm that gave to Ellis's brain that elusion of expectancy, of dread, of horror?

"If you go now," said his host, slowly, "I shall think that you still cherish the past,—the past which makes you ill at ease with me,—the past with its unseemly elements of hate and bitterness and—injustice."

Ellis shrank from the last word. Either the wine had loosened his conventional reserve, or the words were torn from him by a culmination of remorse; at all events he broke out rather hoarsely,—

"Before God, Gordon,—I have regretted that—injustice."

Gordon did not look at him, but the hand holding his cigar moved suddenly, so that the ash was shivered into the air.

"I would have set it straight—later on—if I could—" pursued Ellis, brokenly, roughly, his eyes very blood-shot, his mouth tremulous. "But there seemed no way. I should have had to put myself in the wrong. And

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there seemed—no way. And there was my wife——”

Then Gordon looked at him.

“Ah, yes,” he said, “there was your wife. Your wife is dead, is she not?”

“She died ten years ago,” answered Ellis, indistinctly. He sank into a chair.

“Yes,—I heard that. At the time, I thought of writing you. Then, on second thought, I decided I would not. The peculiar circumstances, you know—” He laughed and threw his cigar away.

“It is strange,” he remarked, “how clearly things come back. I seem to see those old episodes so vividly. That night, for instance, in your house; your wife’s face, at dinner. It was rather pale, Ellis. I wonder how it happened that she was so often pale.”

“I was a brute to her,” muttered Ellis. “I was a fool and jealous.”

“You—dared to be jealous of her? But so are we made, I suppose,—we men! Then I remember the latter part of the same evening—so distinctly. That little slip of yours that only I saw, and did not speak of,—for her sake. You knew that I saw,

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though, Ellis,—you perhaps knew the cause of my silence. I remember the green, pale look that came over your face, and then,—it was just afterward,—you accused me. A pretty trick! You were rather masterly, too, in the way you got those drunken boys to back you up. They owed you money, I believe. Sometimes I have remembered it all with positive admiration during these twenty years."

Ellis turned his face toward him. He was very white and shaking; his heavy lips hung weakly open; his eyes were full of fear.

"For God's sake, Gordon," he said, "don't go over it—I've expiated,—great God, have I not! My wife knew. I don't know how, but she did know, instinctively, and I read hate in her eyes whenever I looked there. I have been haunted by the terror of you and of myself for twenty years." He moaned the words—"For twenty years!"

"'If blood be the price of Admiralty,
Lord God, we ha' paid in full,'"

murmured Gordon, musingly. "I am glad you have enough conscience left, Ellis, to appreciate a simple punishment. I feared, that like the Inquisitors, I should have to

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prepare particular methods for a particular case."

Ellis struggled up from his chair, and stood frozen, with wide and terrified gaze. Their eyes met. "Gordon!" he gasped, "you cannot kill me?" The words were a question. "You cannot—for mere revenge—a bit of a trick—at cards—twenty years ago!"

"Twenty years ago!" repeated Gordon, quietly. He rose and walked forward so that he stood between Ellis and the door.

"For twenty years," he said, "I have thought this thing over. I have had to consider it, not as to magnitude but as to character. It was a fraud—and a fraud is a fact, whether big or little. It was also an outrage. I have divided life into facts and shadows. The shadows are sentiment,—forgetfulness,—joy,—forgiveness. The facts are love and hate, honour and shame, birth, marriage and death. We are not dealing with shadows, but with facts to-night, Ellis. You married the girl I loved; you treated her like a brute, though she was the truest and sweetest soul that ever made a great mistake, and paid for it with self-sacrifice till she died. For that

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you deserve to die. You cheated your friends and guests in a game of cards—a small thing, but an indication. And because you hated me, and wished to save yourself, and because you knew that my worship of your wife would ensure my silence, you accused me of your own fraud,—and for that you deserve to die.”

Gordon’s voice had grown a little hoarse and choked; his eyes were terrible;—his whole figure a menace.

“ You have poisoned my life, my brain, and my heart,” he burst out, stridently. “ You have made me a cynic—a scoffer—an outcast. And for that——”

He drew out a small revolver and pointed it between Ellis’s strained eyes.

“ It is not a question of the importance of things,” he continued, suddenly quieting his voice. “ It is with facts. Values and proportions and all those phrases are but shadows at best. It is the facts of dishonour and hate and revenge——” He cocked the revolver and with his finger upon the trigger he paused and smiled.

“ Your wife loved me,” he said, slowly. And after waiting a moment to catch the look

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of supreme pain in the man's half-stupefied eyes, he fired.

When the officers found him, he was turning the pages of a beautiful edition of *Omar Khayyám*. He looked at his visitors with surprise and some amusement.

"Arrested—I?" he said; "because of—that?" His eyes followed the police-captain's to Ellis's body which lay on the rug beside the dining room table. In falling, the man had caught the white cloth in his convulsive grasp, and it was pulled half off the table; the glasses were overturned, and a long, narrow stain of claret showed in the candle-light like blood.

"But you do not understand," said Gordon, quietly. "We were friends as boys, but something came between us,—one of the inevitable shadows of life." He smiled. "We shall be friends again now that this is all over. It has only been a dream—a shadow. He does not bear malice, I am sure. You will see, it will all come right some day." He laughed, childishly, and turned the pages of the book which he still held in his hand.

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“This is an ambulance case, boys,” said the officer, bluntly. But Gordon paid no heed. He was reading aloud, in the low, clear voice of the student:

“‘We are no other than a moving row
Of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go
Round with the Sun-illumined Lantern held
At Midnight by the Master of the Show.’”

PIERRE OF THE WOODS



DISCORDS

Pierre of the Woods



NE day Pierre du Bois gave up "guiding" and married. He was a loss to the noble galaxy of guides who went out from Kineo every year, for he was a rarely expert woodsman and waterman, and had an

instinct in regard to the habits and haunts of wild things, which he himself ascribed to a remote strain of Indian blood mingling with his French-Canadian and American heritages. But he was one who would prefer independence and privacy for the first years of his married life, so he took a position as assistant in the one shop that the small sporting colony boasted, commonly known as "The Store."

"The Store" was the outfitting establishment for all campers who had, through neglect or ignorance, brought an insufficient supply of blankets, cartridges, flies, reels,

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woolen socks or canned corned-beef. Its resources covered a variegated ground and ran from six-by-six canvas tents to those out-of-date, paper-backed novels, whose soiled covers were ornamented by large-eyed ladies in their death-throes, or superlative sunrises on preposterous peaks. It was a dingy, unsavoury spot—The Store—but it formed a sort of meeting-ground for the men between trips, in the season, and for them took the place of a club. Seldom was The Store deserted, and rarely was it possible to enter it without hearing the chat of the lumber-camps or the trappers, the desultory yet always vitally real talk of out-of-door men.

The life in The Store was a confining one to Pierre du Bois. He did not grow rich, and he hated the shelves and boxes, the inner room with its groceries and its weighing-machine, the many flies, and the smell of rubber blankets hanging up on exhibition. Odd, he sometimes thought, that that very smell of rubber was the pleasantest thing in life on a wet night in the woods when the fire was almost out, and a man was rolled in his blanket and

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poncho seeking sleep under an insufficient tent-fly! Often he longed for the wood-trail, for the "quick-water," where a steady hand was needed,—even for the lumber-camp, full of hardship though it was.

His old pals nodded to him when they came in to gossip round The Store's reeking stove on autumn evenings.

"Great trapping up to Allegash," Ned Shell would say, in his drawling voice. Ned was a wiry, silent man, with a pleasant and ruddy face, and the sort of blue eyes that people trust. "Goin' to be a good winter. 'You goin' to strike the trail, Peer?'"

"No!" Pierre would grunt, angrily. "Wife,—baby. How I strike the trail?"

Pierre only dimly remembered his French-Canadian parents, but in moments of emotion his accent leaped into his speech and blurred the English words.

"Oh, well," long, good-humoured Hal Ferris would say, easily, "Joe,—he's married, but he goes all right."

"Say, Peer," would finally urge Nick, the Indian, "come out with Hawkins' gang this winter. It's a great lumber year."

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Nick and Pierre had always been good friends.

“No! ‘tell you no!’” Pierre’s shout would be involuntarily savage, and he would turn as though to leave them. But, invariably, a word, telling of the sport he loved, of the wild lore dearer to him than life, would hold his ears, and he would listen eagerly to some unimpassioned recital of the luck Ned Shell had had “up to Allegash,” or of a brief unpleasantness between Nick and two “lucifies,” the skin of which ungracious combatants Nick had just sent down to the taxidermist in Greenville.

Pierre would sometimes stay in The Store until very late, listening to this sort of talk, and finally, on his return to his cottage, his wife would detect a dullness in his eyes and a tonelessness in his voice.

She was a pretty, petulant woman,—was Lucy du Bois. She had been a belle, and still sported a pink rose in her hat on Sundays, and her walk had not lost its jauntiness. She adored Pierre and was proud of him, but sometimes, after the manner of her kind, she reproached him with their poverty. “She had had more home to her father’s,”

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she told him, fretfully. "There was little enough for them,—and then, the child and all— Oh, why had she ever been the great, gawky fool as to marry a man as couldn't support her!"

Pierre listened apathetically to her complaints, but the day came when it seemed to him that he could bear neither them nor their cause any longer. That was the day, too, when the man who kept The Store told him that he was wanted there no longer. He had a new and better assistant coming from Greenville,—"a man as could figure an' earn his wages."

Pierre and he had words, and in a fury the younger man struck the older, so that he lay prone like one dead. And then Pierre fled frantically away as though he were trying to escape from himself. He told his wife what had happened; his voice was choked, but he told his story with brutal simplicity. She stared at him shocked, white and terrified, and then burst out into such a wild tirade of vituperation and horror that he shivered under its fury. Then she took the child and rushed out of the house, saying that she would never return. And the door

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banged after her, did not quite latch; and went on banging in the wind.

Then Pierre sat down and thought. Probably the man was dead; he was an old man, Pierre had struck hard, and the fall had been heavy. At the moment he did not in the least care, and as a matter of fact his last chance of penitence had been snuffed out when the door had slammed behind his wife and child. Henceforth, he realized, he was alone, and could only depend on himself. He was a criminal whose arrest would probably mean hanging, though in Maine those things are sometimes adjusted with certain concessions on the part of the law.

Suddenly, in the midst of the dreary reflections with which his brain was spinning and wheeling in his hot head, he thought of the woods,—his old beloved woods. They would shield him and hide him, and with his gun and rod he could keep life in him when he could not smuggle provisions into his wilderness.

The curious, stinging, dancing sensation inside his head cleared and lightened. The silent little kitchen with its big range, half-cold now, and its aggressively ticking clock,

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became the scene of his preparations, brief though complete. He escaped that night before the alarm was given, and disappeared into the friendly forest, going whither no man knew. No message, no sign of him remained; he had faded into the underbrush and the interlacing trees. He swamped no trail by which to be traced. He vanished utterly, and was lost.

Pierre du Bois,—Pierre of the Woods, indeed.

It was five years later that Lucy du Bois sat in her father's kitchen one August evening and talked to Dick McLinn, the game-warden. He was a handsome, dashing fellow, big and blond, and his gray-blue eyes were cool and fearless. He eyed her pretty figure with distinct admiration in his gaze, for Lucy was looking her best, and had dared to tie a sky-blue ribbon in her dark curly hair. Her face had perceptibly hardened during the years since her husband's disappearance, but it was still very young, and very freshly coloured, and she had her old jaunty, coquettish manner in speaking.

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"Don't you think you like me—just a little?" ventured Dick, at once bashful and bold. "Don't you suppose as I've a chance, Lucy?"

"Chance, Dick McLinn? With Peer off there alive and well?"

"Damn him!" said Dick McLinn, between his teeth. "I keep forgettin' you've a husband, Lucy. Couldn't you forget it, too?"

"No," said Lucy. "Not but what I'd like well enough to forget it! Think of the shame he's brought on me! Him a murderer!" Her eyes filled with angry tears, and her face grew scarlet. "I'd like well enough to forget him altogether," she said again.

"Would you, now, Lucy?" asked Dick, leaning nearer, and taking her hand. "And if he was dead, Lucy, would you take up with me, do you think?"

"Oh, p'raps so,—I guess so," said Lucy, with wary indifference and uncertainty. But she was weak and Dick was insistent, and before he left that night she had let him kiss her several times, and she had repeated with energy her wish that she might forget Pierre du Bois and his shameful deeds. Thereupon Dick had again muttered, "Damn him!"

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It was that night that Dick had a talk with old Warrington, the warden whose word was law with all lesser men. The talk was concerning Pierre du Bois. He was at present believed to be in that region known as Desolation, and had been seen at a distance by two trappers. Not long before he had killed a man who came too near his camp, and it was clear that he was a dangerous character. For public safety and legal satisfaction his freedom must come to an end. Others had tried to capture him alive,—well and good. Stronger measures must now be made use of. He must be captured; that was the wish of the authorities, with no qualifying statements. Dick expressed an interest in the wishes of the authorities, which made the older man smile sardonically.

“Think you want a try at some big game trapping, eh, young ‘un?” he remarked.

“Yes; think I do. You say he must be captured. Does that mean alive or dead?”

“Alive or dead,” answered the old warden, and after that opened his lips to add something; but he thought better of it, and shut them with another smile rather more grim than the first.

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"I understand, sir," said Dick McLinn. For he had read in that smile the after-thought which Warrington had suppressed: "Alive or dead—preferably dead."

Dick McLinn had made up his mind to bring Pierre of the Woods to justice. He rarely attempted what he could not accomplish, and now his entire will, energy and desire were all brought to bear upon this one ultimate result. He left next morning at daybreak, alone. No one knew where he was going, except Warrington. He simply disappeared, as Pierre himself had disappeared five years before.

Desolation is one of the wildernesses of the world. It is not a haunt of campers-out; even the most violent fishermen are rarely familiar with it. The woodsmen know it, but it is a bit off the trail, and not in any sense a frequented region. It is a place where a man must swamp his way to avoid subsequent bewilderment,—a place where a man would rather go with a companion than alone. Game is easily seen and easily taken in Desolation, for man is not known and therefore not feared. The big crane stands motionless in the water; the "musk-rat"

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paddles about with soft stroke and loud intermittent splash; the deer comes down daintily, big-eared and big-eyed, waving the white plume of his tail, and placing each fine, small hoof with a precision which is grace, and drinks his fill; all are unmolested. The big caribou passes through with leisurely step; the moose, lord of all, reigns there in undisputed sway. The wild things know it is their vantage-ground, and it is filled with them.

Smoke seldom rises from Desolation. The high-swinging birds are rarely lured down to camp-fires by the smell of the toothsome food affected by humans. But one thread of purple smoke was rising one night from a small clearing in the very heart of the Desolation woods. A man was cooking a piece of venison above the blaze; a man dingily and raggedly dressed but healthily browned, and with the clear gaze and alert frame of the woodsman,—Pierre of the Woods, at home in his forest hiding-place,—alone.

At a rather long stone's throw away from him another man was also making his evening meal. The two, as was noticed by an observant hawk far above, finished eating at

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about the same time, and then the second man began to move slowly and carefully toward Pierre's camp. He walked very softly, very lightly, with a trained step, and he had gotten quite close to his desired goal when he started a deer in a runway. The shrill whistle penetrated the thickets, and Pierre, preparing for the night, stopped short, wondering what sudden scent had startled the animal. It was some distance off, but suddenly the sound came again, close at hand;—the deer was running toward him, therefore away from something else. The bounding step and reiterated whistle passed in the shrubbery, and Pierre knew that some human being was near him. He extinguished the remains of his camp-fire, and taking up his rifle, he sat down at the door of his cabin to wait.

Well he knew that no man approached him in a friendly spirit. He was an outlaw, with a price upon his body. He sat motionless, hardly breathing, looking into the darkness.

It was intensely, awfully still. Who has experienced the tense and muffled silence of the woods without a shudder of almost

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terror? Pierre, since his return to his wild life, had been strangely sensitive to the moods of the forest. To-night his heart was filled with a splendid excitement and exaltation, an ecstasy of presentiment. Some climax was coming to the strange chapters of events which had made up his life. He looked back upon the past with interest, but no remorse. He regretted nothing, repented him of nothing. He could almost have thanked that old store-keeper, five years back in his life, since it was through him that he had come back to his woods. When he thought of eternity it was with no fear,—only an abounding curiosity. To-night, for some reason, he felt intimately, oddly near to eternity. He laughed silently in the dark as he gripped his rifle and waited.

For a long time the dreary call of a far away watchful owl was the only point of sound upon the great blank of stillness. At last it came, that for which Pierre waited,—the faint click of a broken twig. Only an animal can avoid those dry twigs that lie along the wood-trails,—blessed protection to the fugitive, whether man or beast. A faint glimmer of starlight showed between the

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dense branches, enough to disclose the cabin, Pierre knew. He waited.

Then, a shadow on yet deeper shadows, a man came out into the clearing. The camp-fire was quite out and its place invisible, and very faintly came the jar of his foot upon a log. Then there was a long silence. Then, right before the cabin, stood the man's figure.

Pierre moved his arm with the rifle stealthily upward, but some elusive gleam of starlight glinted on the barrel. With an exclamation, the man sprang back; both fired at the same instant.

Dick's shot told; Pierre's sank harmlessly into a tree-trunk beyond the clearing. Target practice in the dark is unsatisfactory, even at short range.

"Who are you,—damn you?" asked Pierre, leaning choking on his arm. He had fallen over sideways when Dick fired.

"McLinn,—warden," was the brief reply. Dick was a bit frightened. He found the experience unpleasant, and his nerves had been strained for several days. "Give me that gun."

He bent down to disarm the other; Pierre

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fired straight up, as near his heart as he could. As it happened, his hand was unsteady and the bullet barely grazed the warden's arm, but he sprang back and clapped his hand to the wound.

"Damn you!" choked Pierre, "and I only one bullet lef'! Never mind!—I give you one hard job;—you got carry me dead back to Kineo."

The last bullet went into his side, and why death was not instantaneous no doctor could subsequently understand. But, as a matter of fact, he lived for several awful days with those two murderous bullets in his body, and Dick McLinn brought him back, dragging and carrying him, paddling the overloaded canoe alone, giving him water occasionally,—food he would not touch,—and listening to his oaths. Finally he died, with two separate and definite curses: one upon Dick, and the other upon that last bullet of his which had failed him, unmercifully leaving him to prolonged agony.

Dick's flesh crept sometimes on looking back upon that ghastly trip; the last two days and nights with the dead man always near were particularly terrifying. Though

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he was not a nervous man, he shook as though with an ague when the trip was at an end, and his face was hardly recognizable.

Dick McLinn did carry his captive dead back to Kineo, even as the wounded man had vowed he should. He made the hard trip in marvellously quick time, and brought in the body of the famous outlaw to the authorities.

Pierre lay on the landing when his wife and child came out of The Store. Dick, trying to be jaunty, but with a very white face, went up to the woman.

"It's all right," he said, with a nervous and ghastly sort of brutality, "Peer's account's all closed. I—I've brought him back."

"Brought him back?" she cried, her eyes wide and strange. She had a little bright-hued shawl around her shoulders, and suddenly she flung it off as though the weight of it were too much. "Brought him. . . . Oh, my God! . . . Where?"

"I—he—I've brought him back," he blurted, "but he ain't—he's dead."

Lucy du Bois looked at him as though she were suddenly crazed. She seemed uncon-

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scious of the growing crowd of people ; she only stared at him. A woman,—Ned Shell's kindly little wife,—touched her arm, but she pushed her from her.

“Dead—dead—dead,” she repeated, in a level and hideous staccato. “Then you killed him,—you killed him. You!—Dead—dead—dead.” She spoke very rapidly ; they all shivered a little at her tone, and Dick shrank from her as though she had struck him in the face.

She approached to within a few feet of Pierre, and at looking at him burst out into gasping words :

“Eh, but you should have known!—You should have guessed!—You should have come back!—It was you, only you, all along. I was a poor fool, but I'd have followed you if I'd had a notion where you'd gone, Peer. I'd have made amends.”

She turned to Dick.

“Oh, you fool! You fool!” she said, mouthing the words, “not to see as how it was him I loved all along. And I was that proud of him, too,—murder or not. Do you think a woman minds murder if it's her man? It was that he didn't come back,—

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he didn't come back—and it broke my heart
—and I talked against him—I talked against
him— Oh, my God!"

She pushed the child toward the body.

"Go on to him, you," she said. "Look at
him if you like. I ain't good enough."

"He had grit," said one of the men, stand-
ing near, to another. "Peer had grit, an' he
knew his woods."

"A great man with a settin' pole," said
the second, "an' a good shot. Don't know
any man I'd rather have trusted to on a
trail."

And such was the passing of Pierre of the
Woods.

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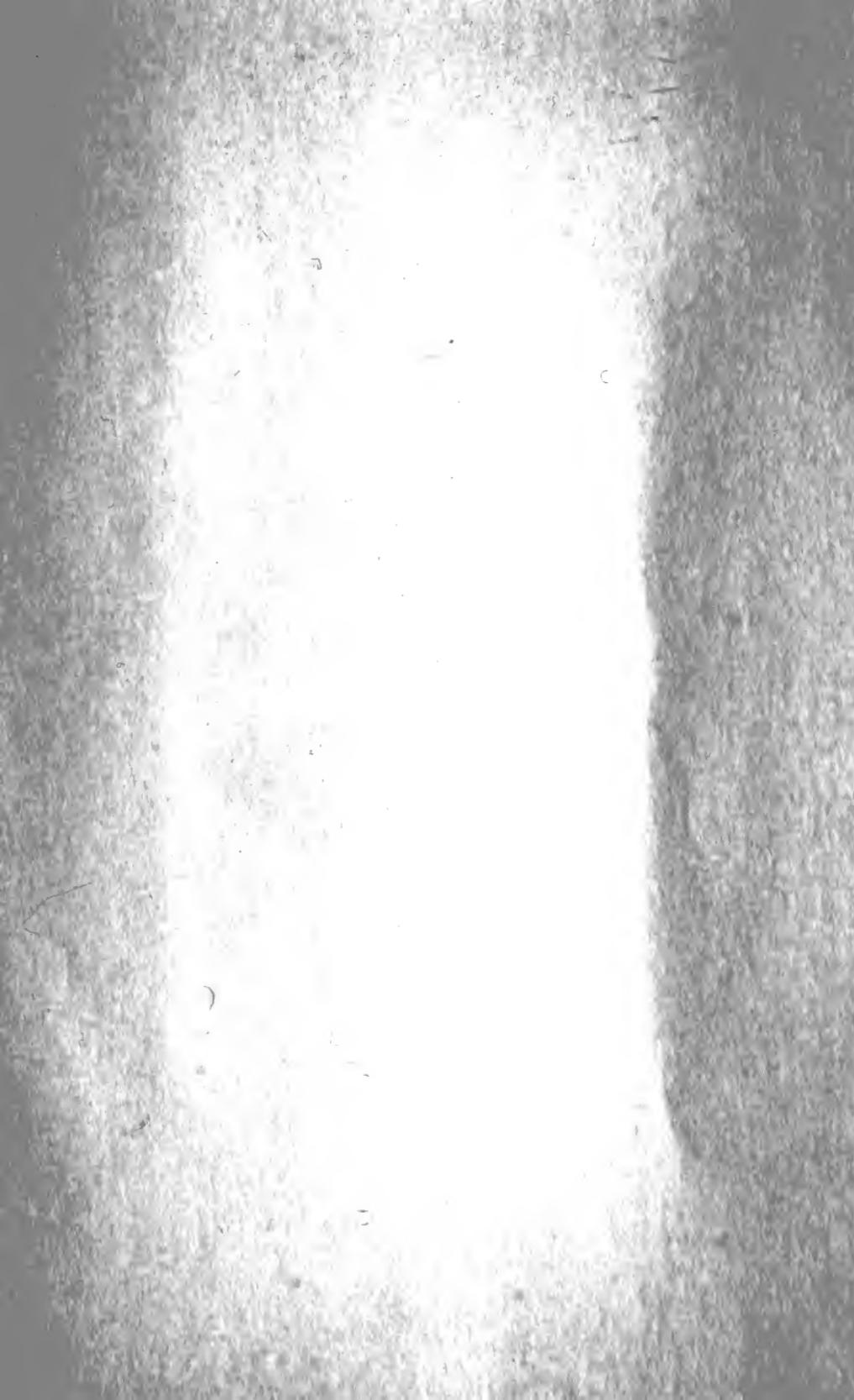
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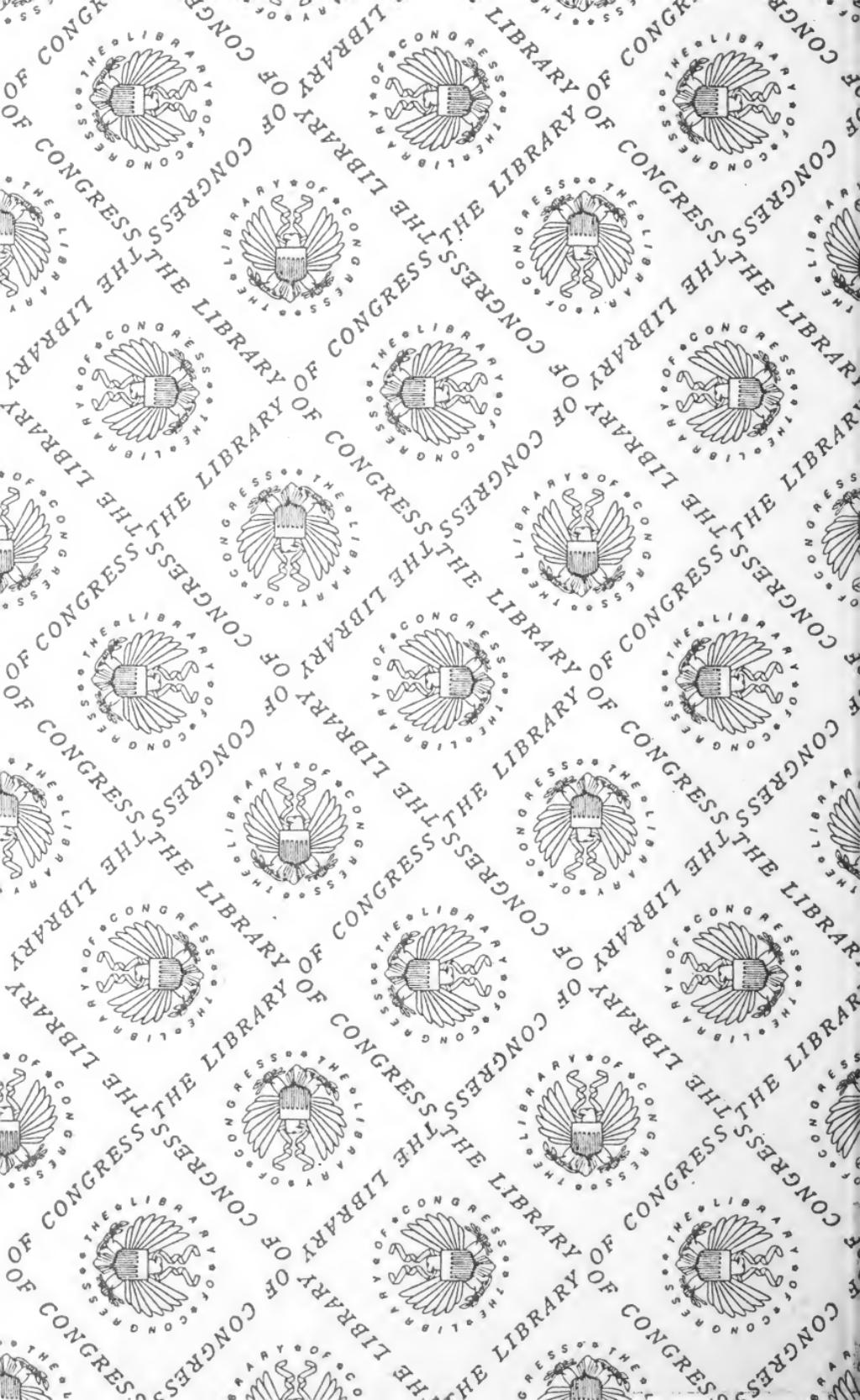
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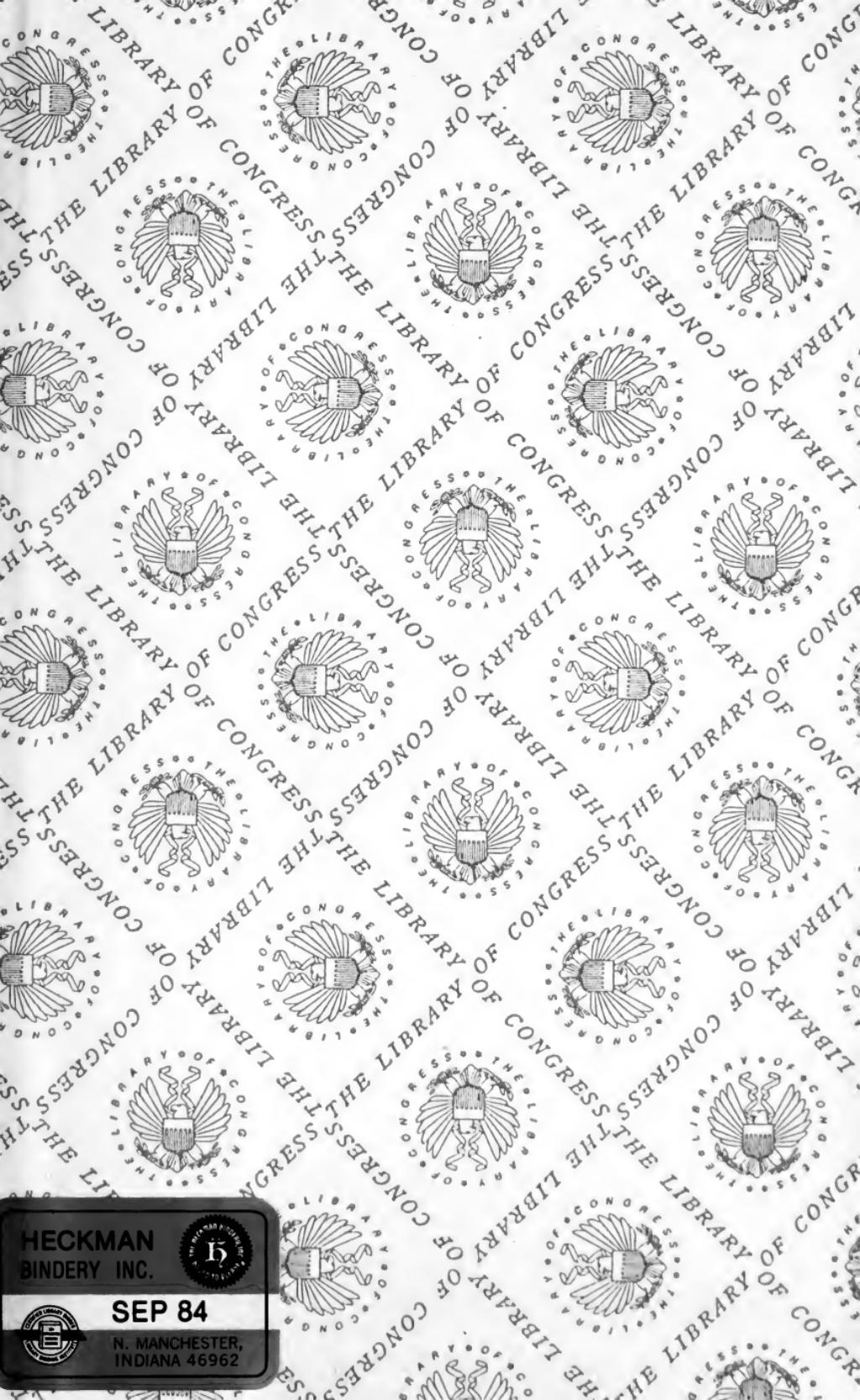
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